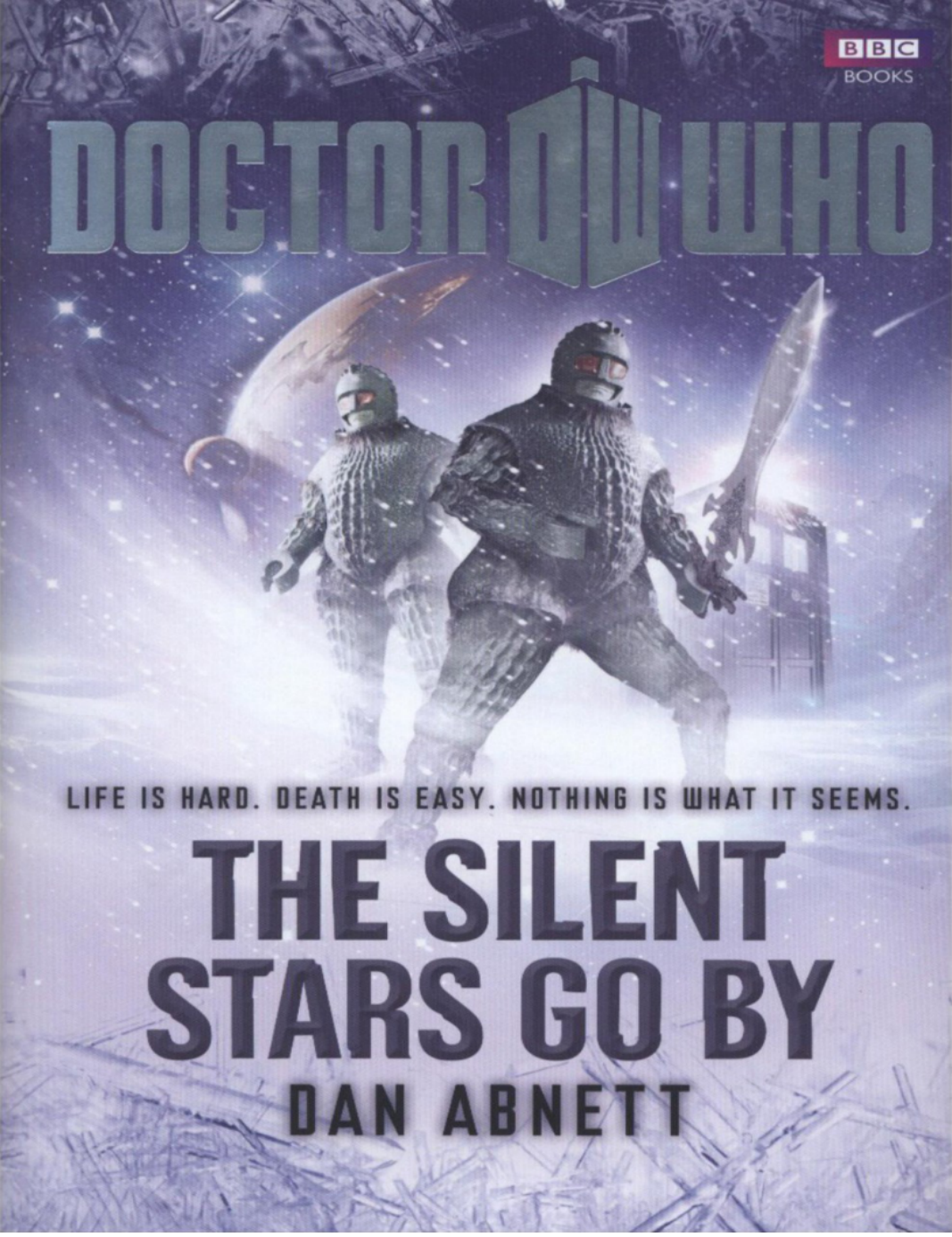
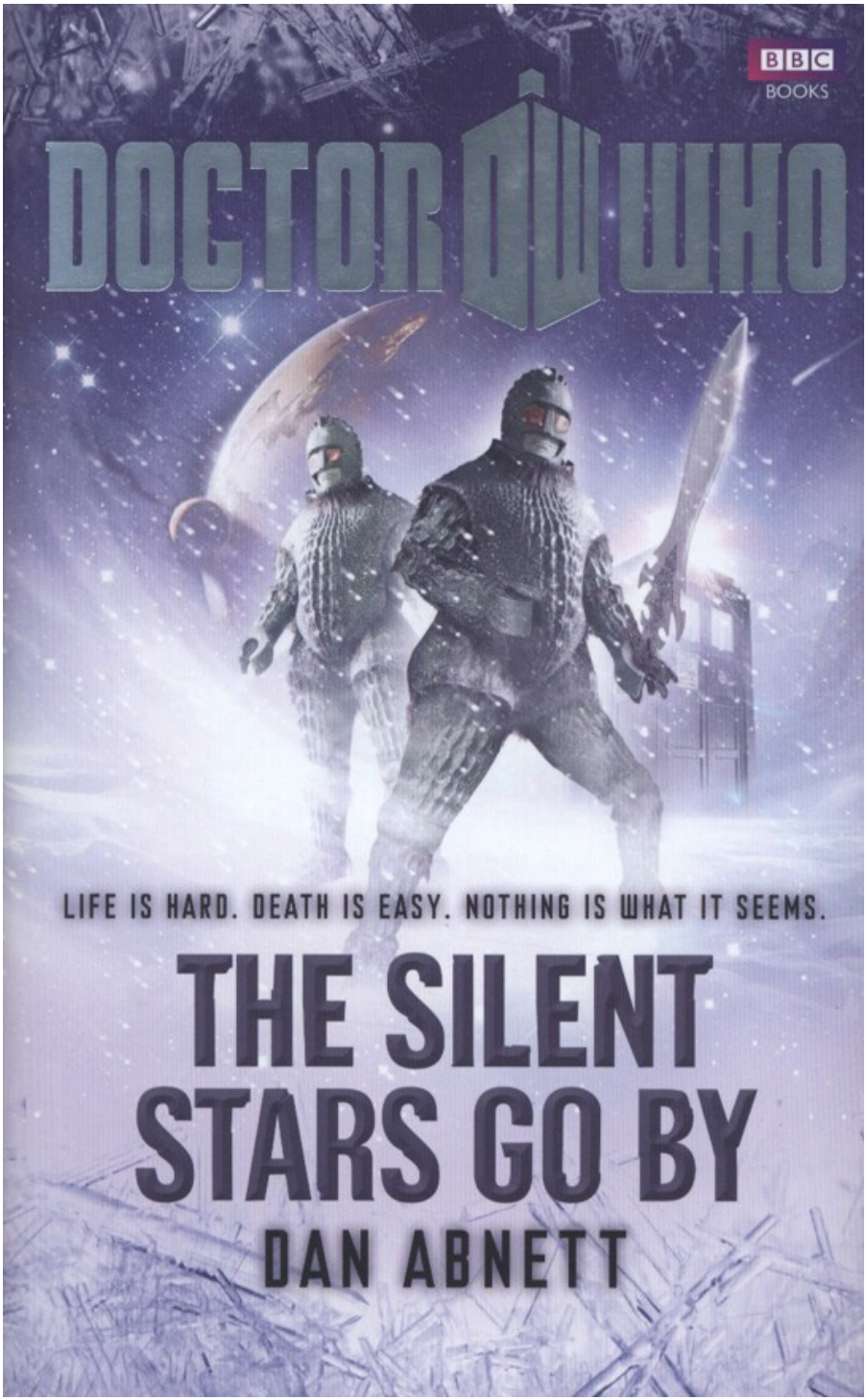

BBC
BOOKS
DOCTOR WHO
LIFE IS HARD. DEATH IS EASY. NOTHING IS WHAT IT SEEMS.
THE SILENT STARS GO BY
DAN ABNETT


BBC
BOOKS
DOCTOR WHO
LIFE IS HARD. DEATH IS EASY. NOTHING IS WHAT IT SEEMS.
THE SILENT STARS GO BY
DAN ABNETT

'Things have to get worse before they can get better. Trouble is, I think they're about to get a lot worse. As worse as worse can be. And then some.'

For centuries the Morphans have worked. With no help from other worlds, they subsist on the food they can grow and that's little enough. But their purpose, their whole life is to maintain the machines that will one day make their world as habitable as old Earth.

Life used to be hard. Now as their crops fail, livestock sickens, and the temperature drops, it's becoming impossible. This year's winter festival won't be the usual celebration. It's not a time for optimism or hope – and it's not a time to welcome unexpected guests. The Doctor, Amy and Rory find a society breaking apart under the strain. Tensions are mounting, old rivalries are coming to the fore, people are dying...

And then the Doctor's old enemies the Ice Warriors make their move. With the cold-hearted threat of invasion, the real battle for survival begins. Or does it? The Doctor begins to suspect that behind everything lies a deadlier, and even more chilling danger...

A thrilling, all-new adventure featuring the Doctor, Amy and Rory, as played by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television

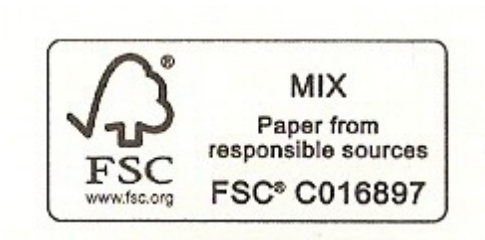
UK £12.99
US $19.99

DOCTOR WHO

The Silent Stars Go by

BBC

DAN ABNETT



1 3 5 7 9 1 0 8 6 4 2

Published in 2011 by BBC Books, an imprint of Ebury Publishing.

A Random House Group Company

Copyright © Dan Abnett 2011

Dan Abnett has asserted his right to be identified as the author of this Work in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

Doctor Who is a BBC Wales production for BBC One.

Executive producers: Steven Moffat, Caroline Skinner and Piers Wenger

BBC, DOCTOR WHO and TARDIS (word marks, logos and devices)

are trademarks of the British Broadcasting Corporation

and are used under licence.

Ice Warriors created by Brian Hayles

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission or the copyright owner.

The Random House Group Limited Reg. No. 954009

Addresses for companies within the Random House Group

can be found at www.randomhouse.co.uk

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available

from the British Library.

ISBN 978 1 849 90243 4

The Random House Group Limited supports The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®), the leading international forest certification organisation. Our books carrying the FSC label are printed on FSC® certified paper. FSC is the only forest certification scheme endorsed by the leading environmental organisations, including Greenpeace. Our paper procurement policy can be found at www.randomhouse.co.uk/environment

Editorial director: Albert DePetrillo

Editorial manager: Nicholas Payne

Series Consultant: Justin Richards

Project editor: Steve Tribe

Cover design: Lee Binding © Woodlands Books Ltd, 2011

Production: Rebecca Jones

Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives pic

To buy books by your favourite authors and register for offers,

visit www.randomhouse.co.uk

Contents

Prologue

9

1. In the Bleak Midwinter

16

2. Let Nothing You Dismay

26

3. If Thou Knowst Thy Telling

36

4. Though the Frost Was Cruel

45

5. The Hopes and Fears of All the Years

59

6. Deep and Crisp and Even

76

7. The Stars in the Night Sky

88

8. Certain Poor Shepherds in Fields as

They Lay

102

9. The Night Is Darker Now

121

10. Underneath the Mountain

134

11. The Maker of Our Earth

163

12. Brighter Visions Beam Afar

184

13. Brightly Shone the Moon that Night

210

14. Born to Raise the Sons of Earth, Born

to Give Them Second Birth

237

15. Now in Flesh Appearing

265

16. Guide Us to Thy Perfect Light

277

17. Close by Me Forever

285

18. Above Thy Deep and Dreamless Sleep

292

Acknowledgements

295

About the Author

296

For George

O little town of Bethlehem

How still we see thee lie

Above thy deep and dreamless sleep

The silent stars go by

Yet in thy dark streets shineth

The everlasting Light

The hopes and fears of all the years

Are met in thee tonight

~ 'O Little Town of Bethlehem',

a song of Earth before

Vesta got up early that morning, before Guide's Bell rang to mark the start of labour, before the sun had come up and brought heat and full light. She got dressed in the dark, in woollens, and skirts both under and over, and a cap, and two shawls. She had gloves that Bel had sewn for her. It was very cold. She could feel the red in her cheeks and nose, and the water in her eyes, and she could see the white smoke of her

breath in the gloom.

It was a biting cold, a bad cold. It was a cold that had a threat to it, not a promise, no matter what Bill Groan and the others said. Winter was supposed to go away, not come worse. Eighteen years Vesta had been alive, and she had never seen a white winter until the last three, each one whiter than the one before.

When she took her coat off the peg, her hands were numb despite her gloves. The twilight of dawn, a grey light made brighter by the snow, was creeping into the back hallway. By it, she found her boots, and the little pot and tie of heathouse flowers she had laid out the night before. She found the pole too, a pruning hook, strong and almost two metres long. It wasn't the season for pruning, but she'd left it ready too because Bel had said it was good to know how deep snow was before you walked on it. Snow changed the landscape, and filled holes up. You could fall, or vanish, or turn an ankle and lie out of help's way so long you'd freeze.

They had all been told not to go out alone, especially early or late, but that was just worry. There had always been stories of things lurking up in the woods. They were stories made up to frighten children.

Vesta had things to do. Some old dog bothering the

herds wouldn't bother her.

She saw her name on the label above her peg. *Harvesta Flurrish.* Next to it, Bel's name. Next to that, an empty peg. Bel was not one for sentiment: she was older and she was clever. However, Vesta Flurrish could not let the day go unmarked.

Chaunce Plowrite had make them all metal cleats for their boots. Bill Groan, the Elect, gave Chaunce permission to make them out of leftover shipskin, and there wasn't much of that remaining. Vesta had hoped, when she woke, she wouldn't need to use them.

But she did.

Snow had come again in the night, overlaying the snow from the days before. Everything had a soft curved edge to it.

In the yard, the sky was night blue, the colour of Bel's eyes. First light, and clear all the way to the stars. The rooftops and chimneys of Beside, bearded with snow, were black against the blue, and so were the bare trees beyond, and the great rising plateaus of the Firmers. The plumes of steam coming from the vents on the tops of the Firmers were luminous white against the cobalt blue. They were catching the earliest rays of sunlight because they were so much higher up than

anything else.

Vesta turned on her solamp, and hung it from her pole. Then she started to walk, her metal cleats crunching, her pruning pole probing the snow cover, one hand holding up the hem of her over skirts. A dog barked in the yard. In the byre behind the Flurrish house, the cattle were lowing.

She followed the North Lane out of Beside, past the well and up towards Would Be, which lay in the shadow of Firmer Number Two.

It was slow going. It was hard work striding over ground that sank under you. Vesta's legs began to ache. She stopped to rest for a minute and looked down at the streams that fed the autumn mills. They were frozen like glass in that stilled place between night and morning.

By the time she reached Would Be, she knew she would not manage to get back to Beside before Guide's Bell rang and called them to work. She resolved to work on after nightchime to make up. Vesta also knew that the people of the plantnation community would excuse her. They would allow her an hour or so, once a year.

Would Be was quiet. The trees were like silent

figures with snowy caps. Autumn had taken their leaves, but winter was bowing their black branches and trunks. Vesta's solamp was beginning to flutter, its charge worn out, but it was getting lighter by the minute. The blue sky and the white snow were both tinged with pink from the sun-to-be.

As she walked along, in the quiet, she felt for one moment that someone was following her. But it was just the stillness, and her imagination.

The memory yard was in the centre of Would Be, a place chosen years ago as a quiet bit of earth. Patience was said to be the greatest virtue of all Morphans, and those who lay here were the most patient of all. Simple stones marked each burial spot, each one marked with a name, as clear as the labels above the pegs in the back hall of the Flurrish house.

There were Flurrishes here. Years of them, laid out and remembered, mixed up with all the other Morphan families. Vesta's mum had gone away long ago, before Vesta was really old enough to know her. She lay here, and Vesta always said a friendly hello to her stone.

But Vesta had come for her dad, Tyler Flurrish, gone four years, taken by a fever. He'd seen the colder seasons coming, and fretted about it with his kin, but

he hadn't lived to see the actual snow and ice. Vesta wondered if he felt it there in the ground, across his grave like a numbing blanket. He would have worried too much, about his daughters Vesta and Bel, and about the future that awaited them.

Vesta crouched by the grave and brushed the snow off the stone so she could read the name there. She took out the flowers she had brought, and set them in the jar on his plot. It would have been his birthday, so she wished him a happy one, and then talked to him a little about the work and how things were.

Far away, down in Beside, Guide's Bell chimed.

Vesta bowed her head and said a few words to Guide, and asked Guide to look after her dad. Then she got up to make her way back.

The stars were still out. Over in the west, behind the bare silhouettes of the trees, one seemed to be moving. Vesta stopped to watch. There had been talk of stars moving. Even Bel said she had seen one do it. Many said it was a bad omen, signifying the coming danger of the cold, but it was a mystery too. Stars weren't supposed to slide silently past in the darkness of a winter dawn.

Moving slowly, making no sound, it disappeared

behind a stand of trees. Vesta hurried along to see if she could catch another glimpse of it.

That's when she saw the tracks.

She almost walked across them. They were so deep in the snow, they held shadow and looked as black as pitch. They cut straight through the heart of Would Be from the north, running away towards Firmer Number Three.

They were the biggest footprints she'd ever seen, bigger than even Jack Duggat would make, with his work boots and his metal cleats on and everything. And it wasn't just the size of the prints - the stride length was also huge.

Vesta stared for a moment. She thought hard, trying to explain what she could see. She wondered if they were footprints that had begun to melt, thus exaggerating their size.

But they were fresh. The snow was only a few hours old, and there had not yet been enough day to start to thaw it. No one was out except her, not this far north of the town. The tracks were clean cut. She could see where the heel and the toe pads had cut.

A giant had walked through the silent woods, and not long ago. If she had left her dad's grave just a few

minutes earlier, she would have met it. It would have come right across her path.

Vesta Flurrish was really scared. Her hands were trembling, and it wasn't from the cold. Beside seemed a long way away: too far to reach quickly, too far to run to, too far to call to. She didn't even want to cross the tracks to run for home. That felt like the wrong thing to do, as if the giant might feel her path crossing his, and turn back for her.

She turned and began to run back towards the memory yard. At that moment, with the sun still not even risen, by her father's side seemed the safest place to be.

But there was something waiting for her in the trees, something with a deep, gurgling growl like a dog being throttled, something with red eyes that caught the gleam of the early light.

Something bred to kill.

Chapter

1

In the Bleak Midwinter

'That,' said Amy, unable to disguise a slight note of surprise, 'was a perfect landing.'

'I thank you for noticing,' replied the Doctor. He beamed, and flipped a row of console switches to their 'off' positions with the flourish of a maestro organist shutting down his Wurlitzer after a career-defining performance.

'Then why are we leaning?' asked Rory.

'Leaning?' asked the Doctor, polishing the glass in the console dials with a handkerchief.

'Over,' said Rory. 'To one side.'

'We're not,' said the Doctor.

'Stand up straight,' said Amy.

They all did. They all looked at themselves in relation to the guard rail uprights.

'Ah,' said the Doctor.

'That *is* lean-y,' he conceded.

'Perhaps not as perfect as I first imagined,' he added.

'"Lean-y"?' asked Amy.

'Well, lean -*ish* at the very least,' replied the Doctor,

sliding down the handrail of the stairs to reach the TARDIS main deck.

'We're allowed to make up words now, are we?' asked Rory.

'I thought that was well established,' said Amy.

'Look, it doesn't matter,' said Rory, following Amy down the control room stairs. 'It wasn't a complaint, the leaning thing.'

'Lean-ish,' the Doctor and Amy corrected him together.

'Whatever,' said Rory. 'It wasn't a complaint. I wasn't complaining. Lean all you like. I just want to check that we're in the right place. We can be *leaning* in the right place. That's fine. As long as we're *in* the right place. *Are* we in the right place?'

The Doctor stopped at the TARDIS door, turned to face Rory, and placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder. He peered into Rory's eyes.

'Rory Williams Pond,' said the Doctor.

'Not my actual name.' said Rory.

'Rory Williams Pond, did I not promise to get you back home for Christmas?'

'Yes.'

'Back home to Earth for Christmas?'

'Yes. Directly to Leadworth, near Gloucester f—'

'Ub-bub-bub-bub!' the Doctor chided. 'Specifics, mere specifics. Home for Christmas, that was the deal, right?'

'Yes.' Rory agreed.

'Doesn't the margin for interpretation seem huge now?' Amy asked him. She was pulling on wellies and a duffel coat. 'I mean, he's not even guaranteeing a street address, so *which* Christmas he's talking about becomes a bit vague too.'

'Oh, I hadn't even considered that,' groaned Rory.

'Home for Christmas is what I promised,' declared the Doctor. 'Home for Christmas is what I will deliver, even if there has to be some leaning involved.'

He looked at Amy.

'Duffel, Pond?'

She was buttoning the toggles.

'Hello? Christmas? Leadworth? Chilly?' she replied.

'Good point,' said the Doctor. He looked thoughtful and twiddled his bow tie, as though it doubled as a thermostatic control.

'I had a fur coat somewhere,' he reflected. 'Big fur coat. Very warm. I wonder where that went?'

Amy glanced at Rory. 'Just the cardy, then?'

'Yes.' he said, zipping it up.

'That's your level of confidence?'

'You can't be disappointed if you don't get your hopes up.' said Rory.

The Doctor opened the doors. A breath of cold air touched their faces, just a gentle gust as though someone had opened an upright freezer.

'Wow.' said Amy.

'There, oh ye of little faith.' smiled the Doctor. He took a deep breath. 'You can almost smell the sleigh bells jingling.'

They went outside into perfect, virgin snow that was half a metre deep. The sky was a peerless blue, and the sun had a fiercely bright clarity. Around them, the woodland was silent and sculptural with snow.

'That's beautiful.' said Amy, gazing and smiling.

'Christmas-y, isn't it?' the Doctor agreed.

'Christmas *-ish.'* said Amy.

'It's great,' said Rory. 'I don't think it's Leadworth, but it's great.'

'Of course it's Leadworth.' said Amy. 'It's that bit of wood outside Leadworth. You know. That bit of wood?'

'Really?' asked Rory. 'Listen.'

'To what?' she asked.

'Just listen.'

They listened.

'I don't hear anything.' Amy said.

Rory nodded significantly with his eyes narrowed.

'That doesn't prove anything.' said Amy.

'No traffic? No... birds?' Rory asked.

'It's early.' said Amy. 'It's Christmas Day.'

'It's not that early. Look at the sun.'

'The roads are closed because of the snow.'

'There's not that much snow.'

'It's Leadworth *before there was traffic*,' said Amy.

'So, not the *right* Leadworth, then,' said Rory.

Amy stomped over to the Doctor, kicking up swirls of snow with her wellies.

'Tell him we're in the right place!' she insisted.

The Doctor was examining the TARDIS. The blue police box was perched on the thick snow cover, tilted by the drift so that it stood at a slight angle to the vertical.

'That explains the lean,' said the Doctor. 'We didn't land on the flat. Never mind. It's quite rakish. I'd say that was, in fact, lean *-esque.'*

'Tell him we're in the right place,' she repeated.

The Doctor turned to them.

'Oh, we're definitely in the right place!' he declared.

'Definitely! This is the right place! We're slap bang in the middle of Christmas. Christmas is all around us! Xmas marks the spot! Can't you feel it? Can't you sense it? It's all mince pies and brandy butter, and candied peel and anxious turkeys! It's tinsel and carols, and baubles and egg nog! It's—'

'Is it Christmas, in Leadworth, on Earth, in 2011?' asked Rory.

The Doctor held up a thoughtful finger, and pursed his lips. He looked from side to side.

'Let's find out,' he decided, and strode off.

'If it isn't,' the Doctor called back to them over his shoulder, 'and I'm just saying 'if', *if* it isn't, then the TARDIS has at least transported us to the most Christmas-y Christmas-ness in the whole universe, which is really quite something, and doesn't deserve any kind of criticism whatsoever!'

'Making it all up as he goes along,' Rory said to Amy as they scampered to keep up.

'Or *business as usual*, as it's also known,' she replied.

They began to ascend a slope through the trees. The

glare of sunlight off the untouched snow was so bright they had to squint. It was hard going. Amy slipped and almost fell over. Rory chuckled so much, he did fall over. He slithered a bit too. Amy laughed, and gave him a hand to hoist him up. The Doctor kept straight on up the slope, swinging his lanky arms for balance, cheerfully singing 'I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In'.

'Come on!' he shouted encouragingly. 'As a canon!'

'We can't even stand up,' Amy shouted back, 'let alone manage a three-part harmony!'

'Come up here! Come on!' the Doctor cried.

They joined him at the top of the rise. The view spread out below them, bright in the sunlight: woodland and fields, hills, mountains, a glorious snowscape, peaceful and still, entirely serene.

'That's pretty stunning,' said Amy.

'It is,' Rory agreed. 'It really is. It's not Leadworth, of course.'

'No,' said the Doctor.

'Unless Leadworth looked like this in, I don't know, the ninth century?' said Rory.

'With those mountains?' asked Amy.

'So, in fairness, it's not even Leadworth- *ish*, is it?'

asked Rory.

'Yeah, but look at the pretty,' said the Doctor.

They were forced to agree that the pretty was really very pretty, and they looked at it admiringly for a while.

Ts that a village down there?' asked Amy.

'There's something very strange about those mountains,' said Rory.

'Village?' asked the Doctor.

'Down there, through the trees,' replied Amy, pointing. 'There, you see? I dunno, about a mile away?'

'I think you're right,' said the Doctor.

'The mountains,' said Rory, shielding his eyes from the glare. 'Very odd.'

'Yes,' said the Doctor. 'That's because they're not mountains. I don't think they're mountains, anyway. Come on!'

He set off down the slope.

'Where are you going?' Amy called after him.

'What do you mean, you don't think they're mountains?' asked Rory.

'We're going to visit that village!' the Doctor announced. 'I mean, since we're here! We might get a lovely Christmas-y welcome! That'd be worth the trip,

wouldn't it?'

Rory and Amy looked at each other and then back at the Doctor.

'What did you mean?' Rory repeated. 'Are you saying they're mountain- *ish*?'

'Come on!' the Doctor cried, stretching out his arms as he strode down the bank. 'Fill your lungs! Ahhhh! Taste that fresh air! Work up an appetite for all that Christmas pud!'

Amy shook her head and set off after the Doctor. Rory paused for a moment and zipped his cardigan right up to the top.

'You know what?' he said. 'It really is ever so cold.'

'Come on!' called Amy.

'It's all right for you, duffel coat,' said Rory. 'I mean, it is very pretty, it really is. But it's cold and it's very... dead. There's nothing around. It's so still and quiet and... bleak.'

The Doctor spun on his heels and pointed at Rory dramatically.

'Exactly! And a bleak midwinter, cruel frost notwithstanding, is exactly the vicinity in which you'd expect to find a really Christmas-y Christmas! So let's do that very thing!'

'Could I go back and get a coat first?' asked Rory.

'Please? It's really cold. And if this is the most Christmas-y Christmas to end all Christmases, I'd like to enjoy it and not be all dead of frostbite.'

'He *is* turning blue,' said Amy.

'I'll just be two minutes,' said Rory. 'Promise.'

The Doctor smiled.

'Of course. Well wait right here. Well be enjoying the view. Because it is, as you'll agree, magnificent.'

He took the TARDIS key out of his pocket and threw it to Rory. Rory caught it neatly and held up both index fingers

'Two minutes,' he repeated, and ran off down the rise behind him. Amy and the Doctor turned to stare at the beautiful scenery again. The sun was very bright. Amy turned her mittened hand into a peak over her eyes.

'What did you mean about those mountains?' she asked.

'Just thinking aloud,' said the Doctor.

There was a long pause.

'Will he be all right?' she asked.

'He's only popped back to get a coat.'

'We should have gone with him,' she said.

'I think he can manage a coat.'

Amy glanced at him.

'We should have stayed together,' she said. 'Don't tut. We don't know where we are, and we just separated. I'm all right with you, but he's on his own. Which one of us is going to get into trouble and need rescuing? Come on, answer me that?'

The Doctor lowered his chin and turned cautiously to meet her look.

'Are you suggesting,' he asked, 'we could be setting ourselves up for some unnecessary shouting and running about later on?

Amy nodded.

'All right, well go and keep him company,' said the Doctor. They turned to head back over the slope after Rory.

And came to a dead stop.

Half a dozen men were standing at the top of the rise in front of them. They were dressed in several layers of heavy, dark clothes, proof against the cold. They wore hoods and mittens and cleated snow boots, and carried hefty farm tools: rakes, hoes and forks. Amy couldn't help noticing how grim and wary the men looked. How *intent*.

'Is this the lovely Christmas-y welcome you were looking for?' Amy whispered.

The Doctor looked a little uneasy. He regarded the heavy farm tools that were being aimed at them in a manner that unpleasantly suggested spears.

He spread his arms in an open, friendly gesture and took a step forward.

'Hoe hoe hoe?' he tried.

Chapter

2

Let Nothing You Dismay

Rory stepped out of the TARDIS, pulling on a pair of thick gloves to go with the parka he'd borrowed. He carefully locked the TARDIS door behind him.

Amy?' he called, setting off in the direction they had been walking. 'Doctor?'

It was definitely the right way. He could see the three tracks of footprints, plus the fourth he'd left doubling back. The snow cover was perfect. Apart from their footprints, not an inch of it had been disturbed.

'Amy? Doctor?'

Rory made his way back to the rise where they had enjoyed the view. He stopped. There was no sign of his wife or the Doctor.

Rory wasn't especially worried at first. He was used to this. It was the kind of thing that happened a lot. People wandered off or got distracted. People didn't wait for you where they said they'd wait (which was rubbish of them, in his opinion, because he'd once waited in more or less the same place for a couple of

thousand years). Sometimes, people noticed more interesting things going on around the comer while you were looking the other way. And that was before you considered the equally likely idea that the Doctor and Amy might be behind some trees nearby, skilfully constructing snowballs with which to greet him.

'Amy?'

Rory started to hunt around. He thought about scrunching together a pre-emptive snowball of his own.

He saw the tracks, the footprints of the Doctor and Amy, running a little way down the slope and back. On the top of the rise, was a mass of footprints that had arrived from the left along the line of the hill and apparently departed the same way.

Rory registered the very first twinge of worry.

'There's a perfectly reasonable explanation,' Rory told himself. 'They've met some nice people and gone off with them. Some... carol singers. They've gone carolling.'

He didn't stop to examine the logic holes in that statement. He set off after the footprints. He'd been gone ten minutes at most. How far could they have got?

After a few minutes' walk, it became evident that 'far enough to be out of sight' was the basic answer to that. Rory felt a little bit more worry. The heavy parka and the effort of tramping through the snow was actually making him feel a little warm. He stopped and took stock.

'Amy? Doctor?'

The bare trees with their heavy burdens of snow echoed his calls back to him.

Something moved.

Rory saw figures up ahead. He stepped forward, starting to smile in relief, ready to scold them for leaving him behind.

He froze in his tracks. His newborn smile froze too.

It wasn't the Doctor. It wasn't Amy. It wasn't any nice friendly people they might have met along the way, either.

Rory knew that a snowball wasn't really going to cut it in the circumstances. He realised he needed to hide, very well and *very* quickly.

He skipped right past worry and went straight to feeling properly, deeply scared.

'Who in Guide's name are they?' asked Bill Groan.

Old Winnowner shook her head.

'They're not faces I ever knew, Elect,' she said.

Winnowner Cropper was the oldest Morphan in Beside, the last of her generation. She was also the wisest of Bill Groan's councillors. If anyone knew, Bill Groan reasoned, it would be her.

'Bet they'll be from one of the other plantnations, Elect,' said Samewell.

Bill Groan looked at the young man. Samewell Crook saw the good side in everything. Bill Groan had an uneasy feeling that there wasn't much of a good side to anything just now.

'They don't look like Morphans,' said Bel Flurrish. Her voice was small and hard, as though it was huddling from the cold inside her.

'They have all kind of different fashions,' said Samewell. 'In Seeside, they have real hats. I heard that. Guide's truth.'

'We haven't had well wishers at the festival for three years,' said Old Winnowner. 'Not since the ice started coming.'

'Well, they're making an effort this year, then, aren't they?' said Samewell.

'They're not wearing hats,' said Bel.

'Jack Duggat's party found them over at the top end

of Would Be,' said Bill Groan.

'Then maybe they can say where my sister is,' said Bel.

Jack Duggat's men, their farm tools hefted like the weapons the old martials carried in Guide's books of Earth before, were leading the two visitors into the main yard. Quite a crowd of folk who were not labouring or searching had come out of their houses to watch.

One of the two strangers was tall and alert, smiling and looking at everything around him. He reminded Bel Flurrish of an inquisitive cockerel, walking comb-up into everything, heedless of its own safety. There was something in his openness that slightly reassured her. A person whose face could hold that kind of expression was not, in her opinion, a person who could do harm to another person.

The second visitor was a girl. She looked cautious, but there was a strength in her. She had red hair. Bel had never seen red hair. She'd never seen anything like it, except in Guide's books. How could something that had only ever been known of on Earth before find its way to Hereafter?

'I want to talk to them, Elect,' said Bel.

'I think you'll find it's my job,' said Bill Groan.

'I think you'll find it's my sister,' Bel replied.

Bill Groan was the elected leader of the Beside plantnation. He was a good man, with dark hair and a beard that had started to show grey the first year the winter wore white. He looked at Bel, right into her hard, angry eyes.

'You know I'm taking this serious, Arabel,' he said. 'Your sister disappearing is a Cat A matter. And now these strangers arrive? It's a concern. But there's a process. I got to do this right.'

'Then I want to be present,' she said. 'Guide help me, I deserve to be present.'

Bill glanced at Old Winnowner, saw the tiny nod she made, and told Bel Flurrish *yes.*

'Take them on into the assembly,' he told Jack Duggat.

The tall visitor heard him say this, and turned towards Bill Groan with a smile.

'Hello, I'm the Doctor!' he announced, stepping towards Bill. A hoe and a pitching fork crossed in front of him to block his way. 'Oh, dear!' he said, recoiling from the heavy wooden shafts. 'I think there's been a bit of a misunderstanding. I really do. Are you in

charge? I'd love to go out and come back in again. You know? Start over! How would that be?'

'That's a funny accent, Elect,' Winnowner said, sidelong, to Bill Groan.

'Indeed.'

The Doctor and Amy watched the locals muttering about them.

'You're freaking them out, and *they've* got the pointy forks,' Amy whispered to the Doctor.

'Yes, they have,' he mused. 'Am I?'

'You really are,' said Amy. 'Could we just play along for now?'

She was shivering slightly, her arms folded tight across her chest. 'On the bright side, they might take us in the warm before they stab us to death with gardening implements.'

The leader of the community council beckoned, and the two visitors were escorted across the snowy yard into the assembly. Firebuckets had been lit, and the solamps turned on. The hall was warm and brown: worn wood beams and seats, polished from years of use and care, floorboards gleaming from a history of footsteps. The nails and pegs that had been used in the building of the assembly were made of shipskin.

Amy stood as close to one of the sputtering firebuckets as she could, basking. She took off her mittens. They were looped inside the sleeves of her duffel coat on a piece of elastic.

The Doctor looked around. He gazed up at the beamed roof. He looked at the circular inlays of metal patterning the worn wooden floor, the metal seams in the beams and ceiling posts.

'This is old,' he said. 'Beautifully made.'

Amy watched him. He crouched down beside one of the wooden guard rails that surrounded the open space they had been led into. He ran an appreciative fingertip along it, like an antiques expert.

'Those nails,' he murmured.

Amy raised her eyebrows. 'The nails matter? Really? Now? Do they *really?'*

The Doctor stood up. 'They might,' he said.

'Rory's out there. On his own. Looking for us,' said Amy. 'Can we get a move on, and persuade them to let us go?'

Jack Duggat's men took up a guard position at the assembly doors. Some Morphans filed in and took their seats. Bill Groan and other plantnation council members sat in the semicircle of chairs at the head of

the chamber.

'Who are you?' Bill Groan asked.

'I'm the Doctor,' said the Doctor.

'You're a doctor?' asked Old Winnowner. 'Of what?

Physic? Medicine?'

'All sorts of things,' said the Doctor.

There was a murmur. The council conferred.

'This is Amy Pond,' said the Doctor.

'An honest Morphan name,' noted Chaunce

Plowrite.

'Thank you,' said Amy. 'I think.'

'Is she your wife?' asked Old Winnowner.

'Oh no!' declared the Doctor.

'No need to sound so outraged. I *could* be,' Amy

hissed at him. 'I'm not, though,' she said to the council.

'We're all kind of friends, really,' said the Doctor.

'It's very informal. We don't stand on ceremony, do

we, Pond?'

'Almost never,' said Amy.

'But this is a more formal occasion,' the Doctor went

on, pointing an expressive, flexible forefinger at Bill

Groan. 'And you're in charge of this community, aren't

you?'

'It's been my honour to serve Beside as Nurse Elect

of the council for eight years,' said Bill Groan. 'It's not a burden I take lightly, as these people know.'

'Of course not, of course not,' said the Doctor.

'And *Nurse*, such an interesting word. From the Latin, *nutricius,* person who nourishes. Nurse as in nursery, as in a place where plants and animals are fostered and bred.'

The council members started talking to each other animatedly.

'What are you doing?' Amy asked the Doctor, sidling up to him and whispering through the fixed grin she was aiming towards the council.

'Just establishing some context,' he replied. 'Nurse Elect. It's a high-status title. A leader. He's the chap with the beard.'

'They've all got beards, Doctor,' said Amy.

'Be fair. *She* hasn't.'

'Wait,' said Amy. 'That bloke's job title derives from Latin? How?'

'The usual way.'

'But Rory was right. This isn't Leadworth,' she whispered. 'This isn't even Earth. So how can they have a Latin name for something?'

'Wherever we are, it's Earth *-ish,'* said the Doctor.

'Very Earth-ish, in fact. My guess is it's getting more Earth-ish with every passing day. And these people are very much human.'

'Why are we wasting time with this chit-chat?' Bel Flurrish asked, her voice louder than any other in the hall. The place fell quiet. She stood up from her seat in the congregation, and glared at the council and the three visitors.

'Come now, Arabel,' said Bill Groan.

'As Guide is my witness, Elect,' said Bel, 'you're just chattering while time runs away. Why don't you ask them a proper question?'

'Oh, good idea!' said the Doctor enthusiastically. 'I like getting down to the nitty-gritty. Like what?'

Bel glowered at him, not at all warmed by his charm.

'Like where do you actually come from? You're not from Beside, so which plantnation are you from?'

Amy looked at the Doctor. 'Plant *nation*?' she mouthed.

The Doctor pulled a face and shrugged in a slightly convulsive way.

'That's... hard to answer, Bel,' he said.

'Really?' asked Bel. 'I wouldn't have thought it was.

There are only three plantnations on Hereafter, so it's not difficult to choose.'

'Ah,' said the Doctor. 'Next?'

'Very well,' said Bel. 'What have you done with my sister?'

Chapter

3

If Thou Knowst Thy Telling

'I think we should try to smooth things out,' said the Doctor, opening his hands in a gentle, calming gesture. He turned slowly so that, one by one, he caught the eye of everyone in the assembly and shared a moment of his reassuring smile.

He fixed his gaze on Jack Duggat. Jack Duggat was a big man, tallest of all the Beside Morphans, and the hoe in his fists was big too. It looked substantial enough to skewer a humpback whale.

'I'm going to reach into my pocket and take something out, all right?' the Doctor told Jack.

Jack Duggat hesitated. The Doctor began to slide a hand into his tweed jacket.

'Careful!' Amy whispered.

'Tell *him* that,' replied the Doctor. He produced the travel pass wallet that contained his psychic paper, and showed it to Jack Duggat. 'I think that clears things up,' he said.

'It says he's from Seeside,' Jack Duggat announced, studying the wallet. 'It says he's come to wish us well

for the season, as is traditional, and extend the hand of friendship from Seeside Plantnation. It also says he is here to offer expertise and assistance.'

Bill Groan rose to his feet.

'On behalf of the Beside Plantnation, I welcome you then as friends at this time of festival,' he said. 'I'm sorry we mistook you. These are troubled times.'

'I can tell,' said the Doctor.

'Wait,' said Jack Duggat. 'There is one thing.'

'What's that, Jack?' asked Bill Groan.

'You know it yourself, Elect,' said Jack. 'I haven't got my letters. I can't read. So how come I'm reading this?' He held the wallet out. No one seemed to want to touch it.

'Obviously, I can explain that,' the Doctor began.

Old Winnowner got up and came down to the front. She took the wallet from Jack Duggat's massive hand and looked at it.

'It is a letter,' she said. 'Guide help me, just like Jack said. A letter from the Nurse Elect of Seeside. It looks... genuine.'

'How could I read it?' asked Jack, sounding distressed.

Old Winnowner looked at Bill Groan in horror.

'Unguidely!' she breathed.

'I'm sure—' Bill began.

'It's unguidely, Elect!' Winnowner said. 'It's conjury!

You know what Guide teaches us about conjury!'

'It's a Cat A wrong,' said Chaunce Plowrite.

'I know it is,' said Bill Groan heavily. 'Jack, take

them to the compter and lock them in while we work

out what to do.'

'It's... it's just paper,' said the Doctor, looking rather

wrong-footed. 'It's just an innocent trick—' 'Conjury

tricks,' said Old Winnowner. 'See, he admits it.'

The men began to jostle Amy and the Doctor away.

Amy glared meaningfully at him.

'I can't take you anywhere,' she said.

The compter was a cell under the assembly hall. Earth-

cut steps led down into a cold, artificial cave lit by a

couple of solamps. A firebucket had been stoked. The

cell had a cage wall with a sliding door. The bars were

made of dull, bluish metal. The interior of the cell was

a sawdust floor furnished with a bench and a soil-pot.

Jack Duggat locked them in and went back up the

steps jangling the keys.

Amy sat down on the bench.

'Great,' she said.

The Doctor grinned at her. He flipped out his sonic screwdriver.

'A lock,' he said. 'I can do locks. They're easy-peasy. Easier than trying to bluff a hall full of frightened people.'

'Why are they frightened?' asked Amy.

'Because we're strange,' he said. 'And anyway, wouldn't you be if you'd never seen a proper winter before?'

Amy shrugged.

'OK, open the lock,' she invited. 'Then what? We've got to get past all those blokes with pitchforks. If we're lucky, maybe they'll light torches and form a mob to chase us back to our castle.'

'You're upset,' said the Doctor. 'I can see that.'

'Top marks to you,' she replied. 'I'm worried about Rory. Hell be worried about me. About us. He could be walking into anything.'

Bel stared fiercely at the Nurse Elect of Beside. 'Just like that, Bill Groan? Just like that? You lock them up? You don't even ask the questions you should ask?'

'He will, Arabel,' said old Winnowner.

'I will,' Bill Groan agreed. He was thinking hard and studying the stranger's wallet. Part of him was worried

that its unguideliness might rub off and contaminate him, but it was too intriguing to set aside. The letter contained in the wallet was exactly the sort of letter that he would have issued as Nurse Elect of Beside. It bore Guide's stamp, and the crest of the Hereafter plantnations. It was the very form of words he would compose. It even looked like his handwriting.

'Perhaps it is real. Perhaps they are who they say they are,' said Bel.

'It's not real,' said Bill Groan.

'Then they could have took it!' snapped Bel. Took it from some poor Seesider who was coming here with good intentions. Took it, and left him for dead in a ditch—'

'It's not real!' Bill snapped back. 'Jack could read it, remember?'

'So stop looking at it, and go and — '

'Arabel Flurrish!' Bill Groan exclaimed. 'Take yourself back to your seat!'

'Go ask them where my sister is!' Bel shouted.

'I know you're worried, Arabel, but you show some common courtesy,' said Bill Groan. He looked back at the wallet and his voice grew smaller. 'The stars, and the cold, and now this,' he said. 'Guide help me, I don't

know what to do. Nothing like this has ever happened to us. I don't even know how to start to think about it.'

'It's conjury,' said Winnowner softly. 'It's a blight of conjury that's brought the harsh winter upon us, and those two strangers are the cause. It's their doing.'

'I don't believe in conjury,' said Bill.

'It's their work,' said Winnowner. 'A blight of conjury.'

'No,' said Bill, shaking his head.

'Did you see her hair?' asked Chaunce. 'I never seen hair like that before.'

'The colour of blood,' said Jack Duggat.

'Not blood,' murmured Samewell Crook.

Bill Groan looked at Old Winnowner. Her brow was furrowed with concern like an acre after the plough, but her thin smile was trying to reassure him.

'What if it *is* conjury?' he asked. 'What if it is an unguidely thing?'

'Then Guide will show us what to do,' the old woman said. 'Chapter and verse, well find the passage that applies to our situation, and follow Guide's words, and be delivered. Like we always are with all things.'

Bill didn't look convinced. He turned the wallet over in his hand, thoughtfully.

'But Jack, who I've known since we were boys, he could read the words of this when he can't read a word otherwise,' he said. 'That's something that should not happen. It should not be possible, not under Guide's laws. And if it's something to which Guide's laws do not apply, how do we fight that?'

Bel Flurrish held out her hand.

'Can I see it, please, Elect?' she asked.

Bill Groan hesitated. Old Winnowner looked particularly dubious. After a moment, he handed the wallet to Bel.

She looked at its outside first, turning it around and around before opening it.

'Oh,' she said.

'What?' asked Bill.

Bel was staring at the open wallet. Words didn't seem to want to form.

'It's — ' she began.

'It's highly convincing, isn't it?' asked Bill Groan.

Bel closed the wallet and handed it back to the Nurse Elect. 'Yes, it is,' she said. 'Please, Elect. Please go down and ask them about my sister. The day is passing and night is coming again.'

'I will, Bel, as soon as I have discussed what best to

do.'

'Don't delay, Elect!' Bel said in despair.

'I will consult the council,' Bill replied. 'An hour, no more. Just so I know what to do in the face of further conjury. Then I will get some answers out of them.'

Bill Groan asked the council to take their seats again, and they quickly fell to talking.

Bel Flurrish watched for a while, fidgeting and anxious. When she could bear it no more, she got up. Everyone was too busy discussing the issue to notice her slip out of the back of the assembly.

Rory ran.

He was running about as fast as he'd ever run in his life. He was certainly running as fast as he had ever run in heavy snow. More than once, the soft depth of it took his feet out from under him, or stole away his balance, and he went sprawling.

Each time, he got up and started running again.

He had no idea where he was running to. He had no idea which way the TARDIS was any more. All he knew for certain was which direction he was running from.

There had been something quite dreadful about the figures he had seen, something that had shaken him.

There had been four or perhaps five figures, and they'd simply been walking in his direction. The figures had been green, as though they were wearing suits or uniforms. They hadn't been doing anything sinister or threatening. They hadn't shouted at him, or shot at him. Nevertheless, there had been something disturbing about the way they were advancing: slow, steady, relentless, utterly untroubled by the snow. He'd never seen anything as simple as *walking* look scary before, and that was saying something, because he'd seen Cybermen march. Cybermen moved with chilling, machined discipline. The way they walked matched the way they thought, and that was the terrifying part about them: the clinical precision.

The figures Rory had just seen had been lumbering. They had displayed a relentlessness born not out of mechanical rhythm, but brutal, unwavering, physical determination.

They'd been big people, whoever they were. Stupidly big. For a second, Rory wondered if they were wearing extensive and heavyweight coldweather gear. He thought he caught a flash of red from goggles or a visor. But even cold-weather gear wouldn't have explained their size. They were towering, bulky

humanoids, broad-bodied and slope-shouldered. They reminded him unpleasantly of the proper bruisers that were taken into A&E on a Saturday night, veterans of fights in pub car parks and brawls with doormen.

Those blokes weren't athletically large: no broad shoulders and round biceps, like the Hollywood idea of a super hero. They were always *real world* big: thick through the chest and waist, with forearms like hams, and wrists as wide as their fists. Their flesh was dense. They had a scary, unglamorous strength, a genuine power, bred not from a gym and a personal trainer, but from graft and life. Those were the ones you were wary around when you were on shift, the sullen ones who loomed, and looked at you from under drink-lowered eyelids, the ones who could suddenly turn and cripple you with a punch.

Rory knew, simply knew as a certainty, that the men he had seen were to be avoided. His first thought of hiding had been dashed. The plodding figures were too close. If they hadn't seen him already, they would be about to, and he had no desire to cower behind a tree while they caught up with him. He'd started to run instead.

Besides, if there were things like that, giant things

like that, blundering around in the woods, Rory would prefer they were chasing him rather than bearing down on Amy and the Doctor.

He could draw them off, perhaps, and then circle back to look for his friends... And then get the hell out of there.

Chapter

4

Though the Frost Was Cruel

'Someone's coming!' hissed Amy.

The Doctor's sonic screwdriver had been poised over the cage door's lock. He quickly put it behind his back.

Bel Flurrish came down the shadowy steps into the lamplight. She stared at them through the bars. 'Where is my sister?' she asked.

'We don't know,' the Doctor assured her gently.

'You *do* know,' said Bel, approaching the bars. Her expression was fierce.

'We don't!' Amy insisted. 'How's about you let us out of this stupid cage?'

'I *know* you know,' said Bel. 'How else would you have a picture of her?'

'A picture?' asked Amy, baffled.

'In that wallet!' Bel exclaimed. 'That wallet full of conjury! I saw it!'

Amy looked at the Doctor.

'Psychic paper,' murmured the Doctor. He turned to face Amy. 'Awkward. One of the drawbacks. It keys

into the thing you most want to see, the thing you'll find most compelling or convincing. Sometimes a strong emotion can imprint, with rather unfortunate consequences.'

'She saw her sister because she's worried about her?' asked Amy.

'It's all she can think of,' the Doctor replied. 'Plus, she suspects us of being involved somehow because we're strangers, so that boosted the subliminal response. Plus—'

'There's another plus?'

'Yes,' said the Doctor. 'I think there's a general level of tension here that's heightening emotional resonance.'

Bel was watching their rapid conversation with increasing amazement.

'You know she's standing right there and she can hear every word we're saying, don't you?' Amy asked the Doctor.

'Yes, I had noticed.'

'And you're aware her general level of freak-out is going to sky-rocket if we keep talking like this?'

'Indeed I am,' said the Doctor.

He turned back to face Bel through the bars of the cage.

He smiled.

'Listen,' he said. 'Arabel - it is Arabel? - Arabel, we really want to help you. We really do. We didn't harm your sister or take her away. We didn't even see her. But we'd like to help you find her. What's your sister's name, Arabel?'

'Why would I tell you that?' asked Bel.

'So that we can help you?'

'And why would you help me?'

'To be honest,' said Amy, 'we're in a bit of a fix here. If we can do something to help you, maybe we can prove to your...' She hesitated, then gestured up the stairs behind Bel.'... to your community that we're nothing to be afraid of.'

'Indeed,' said the Doctor. 'Let nothing you dismay. We come in peace. Besides, no one deserves to be lost in weather like this.'

'No, they don't,' agreed Amy, shooting the Doctor a significant look.

'So what's her name?' asked the Doctor.

'Vesta,' said Bel cautiously. 'Harvesta Flurrish.'

'And when did you last see her?'

'Last night, before bed. She was gone this morning.'

'Do you know where she might have gone?' asked

the Doctor.

Bel shook her head. 'But she took her boots and her coat.'

The Doctor glanced at Amy, and then looked back at Bel. 'Arabel,' he said, 'it's not supposed to be this cold, is it?'

'Is it not cold where you come from?' Bel asked.

'Not this cold,' said the Doctor. 'It's getting colder each winter, isn't it? Every year, a little worse. How many years has it been going on?'

'Three or four.'

'And the reverse is supposed to be happening, isn't it?'

'Of course,' said Bel. 'That is the goal of all Morphan work. As you should know.'

'I was just thinking aloud,' said the Doctor.

'Guide tells us,' said Bel, 'that patterns may worsen in the short term while the greater changes take effect. So the Elect teaches.'

'That's true,' said the Doctor. 'Sometimes. With major projects, that's certainly true, sometimes. You're dealing with continental weather systems. Global climate. But I'm not sure. That's why you haven't done anything drastic, isn't it? You've been telling yourself

it's just a symptom of short-term climate change.'

'What's this all about, Doctor?' Amy asked. 'Why are you talking about weather?'

'Look at her clothes,' said the Doctor. 'Her everyday clothes are well made but worn from long use. Her overcoats, and shawls, her boots... they're all new. The people here are not used to winters this cold.' He looked back at Bel. 'Will you let us out, Arabel?'

Bel glanced nervously at the stairs. 'I should not. It is against the word of the Elect.'

'If you let us out, we will help you,' said the Doctor.

Bel wavered.

'But I do not have the key!' she declared.

'Arabel, tell me why people are so worried about conjury?' asked the Doctor.

'It's a Cat A crime,' said Bel. 'We are taught we may only do what Guide tells us to do. If it is unguidely, then it is forbidden.'

'Arabel,' said the Doctor calmly, 'just for a moment, you're going to have to accept that Guide has told me how to do things that may not have been mentioned to other people.'

Bel Flurrish blinked and then narrowed her eyes.

'What do you mean?'

The Doctor took the sonic screwdriver from behind his back. He adjusted it, ratcheted open the pincers, and aimed it at the cage door's lock. It glowed as it warbled softly. The lock sprang with a click.

The Doctor opened the cage door.

Bel stared at him.

'Let's go and find your sister,' he said.

They slipped up the stairs of the compter, the Doctor leading the way. The sound of voices drifted from the assembly hall.

'They will be talking for hours,' Bel whispered.

One of Duggat's men was watching the doorway, leaning on the handle of the shovel he'd been carrying as a weapon. He was watching the council debate through the half-open door. A strong, cold draft was coming down the side corridor. Arabel indicated that direction with a tilt of her head.

Hugging the chilly stone of the wall, they crept past the guard, and hurried down the corridor to the rear gate. Bel struggled a little with the heavy bolt. The Doctor helped her. Amy kept glancing over her shoulder. She was certain the guard was going to hear the screech of the bolt withdrawing.

The Doctor managed to pull it silently. He ran his

finger along the bolt.

'The same metal as the nails,' he whispered.

Amy glared at him.

He gauged her reaction. 'No? Not the time for that?'

he asked, still whispering.

She shook her head.

They scuttled outside, into a little snowy yard

behind the assembly. Amy carefully latched the door as

quietly as she could.

Bel stepped up to the Doctor and put her hand flat

against his chest, pushing him firmly against the yard

wall.

'I am only doing this to help my sister,' she said. 'I

will not have her die too.'

'Of course,' said the Doctor.

'If you play me for a fool...'

'I won't, Arabel. I promise.'

'This is our house,' said Bel, closing the door behind

them. No lamps had been lit, and no heat stoked up

either. Bel had left the Flurrish house early in her

search for Vesta. The house ached with cold. Daylight

leaked in through the snow-dusted windows.

'We won't be disturbed here,' said Bel.

'It's splendid,' said the Doctor. 'We just need

somewhere to think, just for a minute. There's no sense in running around the countryside looking for Vesta in this weather. We need to work out where she might have gone.'

Til raise some heat,' said Bel, heading for the stove.

Amy was rubbing her hands together briskly. As Bel moved away, she leaned close to the Doctor.

'Really?' she asked quietly. 'No sense in running around the countryside? Not even to, I don't know, *get away from here*?'

'We're safe enough.'

'And not even to *look for my husband?'*

'Rory's safe enough too,' said the Doctor. 'He's probably sitting in the TARDIS right now, making a cup of tea.'

'I don't believe you sometimes,' said Amy.

'Trust me, Pond,' the Doctor replied, flashing an impish smile. He began to look around the spare and simple room. 'Something's going on here, and it requires attention.'

Bel returned from banking up the stove. A rumour of heat began to infuse the room.

'Everything's hand-crafted,' mused the Doctor, looking at the furniture and the construction of the

house itself. 'Beautifully made, but old. A lot of wood. Local timber, I'd guess, and expertly cut and finished. And the nails and handles, you see? The screws?'

'Shipskin,' said Bel. 'Not much of that left now.'

'Shipskin,' the Doctor echoed. 'Of course it is. Shipskin.' He looked at Amy. 'Hull metal,' he said, 'salvaged from the vessel that brought the Morphans here.'

'Earth before and Hereafter,' Bel said.

'And how long have you lived here, Bel?' asked the Doctor.

'All of my years,' she said.

'I meant, how long have the Morphans lived on Hereafter?'

'Twenty-seven generations,' she replied. She paused, and stared at the Doctor. 'Guide help me, why would you ask that?' she said. 'You cannot be a Morphan and not know that, but there is no one else on Hereafter who is not a Morphan.'

'There is now,' said the Doctor. 'Arabel? Bel? I know it's a lot to grasp, but you have to keep trusting us. Think of it this way. Guide sent us to help when you needed us most. Tell me this, Bel, why were the men who found us armed?'

"They were searching for Vesta,' Bel began.

The Doctor shook his head.

'The Morphans have no weapons, no firearms or anything,' he said. 'They had to grab makeshift weapons... axes and pitchforks, that sort of thing. Why would men do that to go looking for a missing girl? Why would they arm themselves when they're not even used to bearing arms?'

'They...' Bel began. She stared down at the old kitchen table as she thought about her answer. 'We... we have lost livestock. Just this winter, never before. Something has been feeding on sheep and goats. We think maybe it is a dog that has got out and run feral. Maybe from another plantnation.'

'It would have to be that, wouldn't it?' said the Doctor. 'Because there are no other animals here. Only the ones that you Morphans brought with you. Hereafter has no indigenous animals that could kill a sheep.'

'I don't know what that word means,' said Bel, 'but the men took staves and axes because they were afraid that...'

'That whatever's doing the killing might have gone after bigger prey,' said the Doctor.

Bel nodded. Her lip trembled.

'How long has there been trouble here, Bel?' asked Amy.

'Life here is always hard,' said Bel, with forced lightness. 'But three years ago, the winter started going white, and worse each year. Then we really started to struggle. Not enough food, not enough fuel to get by. We used to see people from the other two plantnations quite regular, particularly at festival time, but not since travelling got hard. It's not just that the winters are cold, it's what the cold winters mean.'

'They mean it could all be failing,' said the Doctor. 'The entire terraforming programme.'

'The Terra Firmers will never fail,' said Bel emphatically. 'It's part of our duty to maintain them. Our plantnation is called Beside because it is beside the Firmers. That is the great task Guide has given to us.'

'Now, you told me,' said the Doctor, 'that Guide tells you that can happen sometimes. That sometimes the winters get worse before they can get better.'

Bel nodded again. 'That is what Guide says.'

'But you don't believe it, do you?'

Bel shrugged. 'We must trust in the Elect and the

council, but I don't think Bill Groan believes it either. It is hard to trust that things will get better when they get worse.'

'There's more to it, though, isn't there?' asked the Doctor.

'There have been signs. The livestock dead. And some say they have seen people in the woods around the plantnation. The shadows of tall men, watching us. No one has seen them clearly, but they are big. And they cannot be men, because all men from Beside are accounted for.'

She looked at the Doctor.

'Until today,' she said.

'Yes, but I came and said hello, so it can't have been me,' said the Doctor.

Bel sat down at the table and rested her nose against her clasped hands as though she was praying.

'I told Vesta not to go about alone,' she said quietly. 'I told her. She said there were no giants in the woods, and she could scare off any rogue dog. But I had seen the stars, and she had not.'

'The stars?'

'It was the other sign. Stars that go by at night, overhead. They make no sound. I've seen them, and a

few others have. Old Winnowner says that the stars are an omen. The worst of all the signs. They warn us that the world is in turmoil, and that despite all our patience, the Morphan effort is in danger.'

'You said something just now,' said Amy quietly.

The Doctor and Bel looked at her.

'You said you were only letting us out to help your sister, because you didn't want her to die too. Who else has died?'

'Our mother died years ago,' Bel replied. 'Then we lost our dad four years ago to a fever. I won't lose another Flurrish, I swear to Guide, I—'

She stopped abruptly.

'Oh Guide help me!' she cried, looking at the Doctor and Amy in dismay. 'I think I know where she went! I think I know!'

'Where?' asked Amy.

'I had forgotten the day,' said Bel, scraping back her chair and getting up. 'Vesta remembers these things, I don't. It's the anniversary of our father's death. She... she would have gone out early to lay flowers on his grave. She would have gone up to the memory yard before the start of labour.'

'Then that,' said the Doctor, 'is where we should

look first.'

Out of breath, Rory slithered to a halt. He tried to get his bearings from the three mountains that the Doctor had said weren't mountains at all. He could see them through the trees, pluming steamy white clouds against the perfect blue of the winter sky.

It felt like it was past midday. The air was clear and the sun was high and bright, but it was still as cold and hard as glass.

Rory had a stitch, and his legs ached from bounding through the snow. Panting, he turned in a full circle, checking the trees around him.

He heard a sound. A crunch of snow. A footstep biting into the soft fall. Surely, after all that running, he'd outdistanced those dreadful lumbering figures?

He edged forward, listening intently. The woodland clearing was silent, the light bouncing off the snow so bright it made him squint.

Another crunch.

He took another step, his heart beating very fast.

A figure stepped out in front of him. He was big, but he looked scared too. He was holding an axe.

Rory recoiled. 'Oh, hello,' he said in surprise.

'Who are you?' the man asked, his voice thickly

accented. He took a step forward and the axe rose a little.

'Listen,' said Rory, 'listen to me. There's something in the woods. These... figures. Very, very big figures...'

He glanced from side to side. Other men dressed like the bearded man with the axe were emerging from cover, surrounding him. They carried an assortment of picks, mattocks and pitchforks.

Have you seen the Doctor at all?' Rory asked hopefully.

'Where are you from?' one of the men demanded.

'Urn... Leadworth?' Rory tried.

'What kind of unguidely answer is that?' asked one of the others.

'I don't know his face,' said the man with the axe.

'I'm a friend! I'm friendly!' Rory declared, holding up his hands.

'He's a stranger,' said a man with a pick.

'Where is Vesta Flurrish?' the man with the axe asked Rory.

'Is it... *near* Leadworth?'

'Take him,' said the man with the axe. 'Bind his hands. The council can decide what to do with him.'

'There's really no need for any of that!' Rory cried.

'Why don't I just come with you? Without any need for binding of any sort? Why don't I just come along with you?'

Despite his protests, they grabbed him. They were strong, they pinned his arms behind his back and turned him around, steering him by the shoulders. Then they all stopped.

Something had walked into the clearing behind them. It stood gazing at them through glinting, red, triangular eyes. It was green, the colour of moss on the underside of a stone, and its thick skin was whorled and ridged like the hide of an alligator. A faint rasping, hissing wheeze of respiration was coming from its barrel-thick chest.

It was at least two metres tall and built like an oak tree.

'Told you,' said Rory.

Chapter

5

The Hopes and Fears

of All the Years

The green thing hissed out a breath and took a step. Rory flinched. The man with the beard let out a great howl of fear and fury, and swung his axe.

The axe was a good one, with a head fashioned from shipskin. It struck the green thing square in the centre of the chest, and actually bit into the crocodile skin bulge of the scaled armour.

The green thing didn't even jolt. It was as though the bearded man had buried his axe into an ancient and unyielding tree.

The axe was stuck fast. The bearded man tried to pull it out for another swing. The green thing made a grunting hiss and lashed out with its left arm. A massive, pincered hand caught the bearded man on the upswing and hoisted him into the air. The impact was an ugly, bone-cracking sound that made Rory flinch again. The bearded man flew backwards and upwards, particles of snow fluttering off his legs, and tore into the low canopy of the trees. He crashed back down

onto the snow, bringing broken branches, twigs and a heavy fall of snow-gather with him.

Once he had landed, he stopped moving.

The other men registered a moment of shock at the sheer force that the upswing had communicated. A single swipe had propelled their leader metres through the air. Chastened, they hurled themselves at the green thing, raining blows with picks and mattocks and other stout farm tools.

It was brave. It was a terrible mistake. The blows rebounded ineffectually. The green thing threw out its right pincer and knocked a man sideways into a tree. The impact jolted snow out of the branches. Taking another step, the green thing reached up, grasped the haft of the axe buried like a handle in its belly, and pulled it out. Then it swung the axe, catching another man in the face with the back of the axehead. The impact lifted the man clean off his feet. He landed on his back in the snow with his mouth open, dead or profoundly unconscious.

A man with a pitchfork rushed the green thing, trying to run the tines through its deep torso. He yelled as he charged. The green thing tossed aside the axe, which disappeared through the trees, spinning end over

end and making a slow *whupping* sound like a ceiling fan, and raised its left pincer. The movement was fast and oddly precise for something so stiff and ungainly. The pincer neatly caught the thrusting pitchfork between the tines and blocked it. The man lurched and stumbled as his pitchfork stopped moving. The green thing tightened its clamping grip and snapped the head of the pitch fork off its wooden shaft. The man holding the pitchfork jabbed the broken end repeatedly against the thing's ridged torso. The green thing pointed its right pincer at him.

There was a small tube attached to its forearm. It was a weapon of some kind. The discharge made a nasty, throbbing sound, and the air seemed to warp and bulge. Caught by this twisting, pressurised force, the man dropped dead.

Rory was running by then. In attacking the green thing, the men had entirely forgotten about him. The sheer, clinical brutality of its response had proved to Rory that his first instincts had been correct. The giant green figures were not to be bargained with. They were lethal and malicious, and they existed only to be avoided at all costs.

Rory's ears were ringing from the awful sonic

discharge of the thing's weapon. Even though it hadn't been aimed at him, it had given him an awful headache and, from the blood he could taste on the back of his tongue, a nosebleed.

The other men - those still on their feet – were fleeing too. Rory gasped as he heard the sonic weapon fire a second time. The air shimmered and buckled, and a man fleeing a dozen metres to Rory's left crumpled into the snow, rolled over, and lay still.

The next one was going to be him.

There was no cover.

The next blast was definitely going to kill him.

They left Beside and followed the North Lane track up past the frozen well and out of what Bel called the Spitablefields. These large, gently sloping areas were blanketed with snow, but the Doctor and Amy could see that they had been carefully cleared and ranged into strips for cultivation like a market garden. Amy noticed lines of planting canes and frames, all edged with snow like ermine, left over from the growing season. The pathway itself, a climbing track, was screened on the settlement side by a box hedge that, snowbound, looked like a giant frosted slice of key lime pie.

Dogs barked in the village below.

'What was that?' asked the Doctor, stopping to listen.

'Dogs,' said Bel.

Amy looked back. An afternoon whiteness was beginning to hollow out the blue of the sky, and the vapour around the mountains had become more of a haze. There was a smell in the air that she associated with approaching snowfall. It was a smell she had cherished as a little girl.

'Not dogs,' said the Doctor.

They continued. Beyond the Spitablefields and the hedged track line, a stand of trees marked the edge of snow-dusted woodland.

The Doctor stopped again. He cocked his head to one side. 'Did you hear that?' he asked.

'What?' asked Amy.

'That sound. I know that sound.'

'What sound?' asked Amy.

'Just dogs,' said Bel.

'No, the other sound. It's a long way off, but it's carrying. It's distinctive. I know that sound. Where have I heard it before?'

Amy listened. 'I can't hear anything,' she began, and

then stopped. 'Oh, wait,' she said. 'I heard something then. A funny noise.'

The Doctor nodded. 'A funny noise...' he echoed.

He turned around suddenly and stared at the hedge.

'I think you should come out,' he said.

A man stepped out of the shadows.

'I think you should tell me where you're going, Arabel,' said Samewell Crook.

Rory ducked behind a tree. Dread had a grip on him, and he desperately wished that breathing didn't make so much noise. Exertion combined with panic was making the air suck in and out of his lungs in gasps. The sound was going to give him away.

He'd heard two more of the blasts, the earshredding throbs of the green thing's energy weapon. The second blast had been accompanied by the agonised yelp of a man being felled by lethal, contorting air. The green thing was close. What did it want, apart from to kill them all? Was it trying to eliminate witnesses? Witnesses to what? Was it just out for revenge for getting an axe swung at it?

Was it after something else that Rory couldn't begin to imagine?

His mind was all over the place. It was hard to

focus. That was shock and the panic response. He forced himself to concentrate. He needed to listen. Hiding behind the tree, the only way he could tell how close the green thing was, was to listen, but he couldn't hear anything over his own panting. He held his breath. It was a considerable effort. He held on, and listened. It felt like his eardrums were going to burst.

After a few seconds, he heard deep, crunching footfalls in the snow, the steady march of the towering monster. It was drawing level with his hiding place. There was nowhere else to hide. Snow was all around, a white backdrop against which he would stand out, no matter where he went. Trees were no good. Sooner or later, you could walk around a tree. There were no boulders, no bushes, no holes in the ground.

He heard the crunching footsteps again, and a wheeze of respiration to go with them. It reminded him of his own need to exhale. He eased out the breath he had been holding in, trying to do it soundlessly. He so wanted to greedily suck in fresh air.

The green thing appeared about twenty metres to his left, side on to him. It emerged from between two trees and stood still, slowly scanning to left and right.

Rory, gently and ever so slowly, melted himself back around the tree trunk he was sheltering against, putting it between him and the creature.

It turned and looked his way.

How could it have seen him? He was barely moving. The thing looked like a giant, humanoid reptile. Did reptiles have acute sight? Hearing? Did they have other senses? How did they hunt? He had a feeling that he'd once read something about crocodiles having amazing night vision.

Rory realised that terror was flooding his mind with jumbled thoughts. Nothing he was thinking about really mattered. He had to find an escape route. What the Doctor would call a 'wise exit strategy'. What Amy would call a 'not at all stupid bit of proper running away'.

Amy.

Rory knew he simply had to see her again. He wasn't going to let a giant shambling lizard kill him in a snowy wood for no good reason. His wife would never let him hear the end of it.

He broke cover and started to run again, this time in a path perpendicular to his original route. A hasty glance over his shoulder told him that the green thing

had spotted him. It had turned to blunder after him.

Had it detected movement? Heat?

Heat made a kind of sense. He clung on to the notion.

Why wasn't it shooting? Why didn't it fire its horrible gun? It could just bring him down and save itself the effort of chasing.

There seemed to be only three possible answers to that. It had run out of shots, which seemed unlikely. That was one. The second was that he was out of range.

The third was that it wanted him alive.

'Slow down!' hissed Amy.

The Doctor was leading the way up the snowy track into the woods with the sort of indefatigable and boundless enthusiasm only he could muster. She scrambled to keep up.

'Are we taking him with us?' she asked.

They both glanced back.

Arabel was following them, with the young man in tow. Samewell was a pretty good-looking bloke, Amy had to admit. He was fresh-faced and cheerful. He seemed trustworthy. He was having an argument with Arabel as he pursued them up the lane.

'It's a Cat A crime,' Amy heard him saying. 'A Cat A crime, Bel! What are you doing with them?'

'I'm looking for Vesta.'

'But you let them out, Bel! What will the Elect say?'

'I don't know, Samewell? Are you going to tell him?'

'I ought to!' declared Samewell. 'Come on, stop and talk to me! Think about this! You're consorting with conjury!'

'I'm looking for my sister,' Bel replied. She kept walking, pulling her long skirts up a little so they didn't get trodden into the snow.

The Elect will find Vesta,' said Samewell. 'Where is your patience?'

'Shut up, Samewell.'

'Those who are patient, they provide for all of the Plantnation,' he said.

'Don't quote Guide's words at me!' Bel snapped.

'I think we'll let him come with us,' the Doctor told Amy.

'Because if he goes back, he'll tell them where we've gone?' asked Amy.

The Doctor nodded. 'I don't think he's going to overpower us singlehanded,' he said.

'I think he'd like to overpower her singlehanded,'

said Amy.

'What?' asked the Doctor.

'He fancies her,' she replied. 'It's obvious.'

'Because they're arguing?'

'Why else did he follow us? He could have just raised the alarm.'

The Doctor frowned thoughtfully and nodded.

'Keen insight, Pond. The mysterious operation of the human heart. Good job.'

He came to a halt. They had climbed quite a way into the skirts of the woods. Would Be, Bel had called it. The Spitablefields fell away behind them. They could see the village of Beside and, south of that, the glint of sunlight on the glass roofs of the heathouses.

'Would Be,' said the Doctor, looking at the shadowed trees and their bright mantles of snow. 'The original Morphans looked at this world, and imagined how it *would be*. Like a declaration of intent.'

'I thought she was saying "Wood B",' said Amy.

'She probably is,' replied the Doctor. 'That's probably all it was originally. A territorial designation. Wood B. The hospitable fields. Even the name of the settlement. Hmmm. What's the betting?'

He turned to Bel.

'Is the third plantnation called Aside?' he asked.

'Yes,' she replied.

'How did you know?' asked Amy.

'Oh, a wild guess. Aside, Beside and Seeside. Sites A, B, and C.'

'Ah,' Amy smiled. 'So Seeside isn't beside the sea, then?'

'I imagine not, though I do like to be beside it,' said the Doctor.

They walked on for a moment, not talking, listening to the breathless hush of the wood and the crunch of their footsteps and the half-audible bickering coming from behind them again.

'What is Hereafter?' Amy asked.

'It's a colony world, a human colony world,' said the Doctor. 'Late expansion, Diaspora Era. Think of the name, Morphan?'

'Like orphan?'

'Yes, but also referencing the terraforming or terramorphing processes these settlers were supposed to perform. To colonise a suitable, Earth-like distant world and make it more Earth-like.'

'Earth-ish?'

'Indeed.'

'Where's the real Earth?' Amy asked.

The Doctor shrugged. 'Somewhere in the past. I think the Earth and the solar system are gone. The end of their natural lifespan. Humans had to find somewhere else. Think about the name Morphan again.'

'How long have they been here?' asked Amy. She had been to times when the Earth had been abandoned before, but the idea that the world no longer existed seemed especially melancholy.

'Generations,' replied the Doctor. 'Many generations. Twenty-seven, she said. Lifetimes of backbreaking toil and hard living. It takes a long time to shape and tame a world, even an Earth *-ish* one. All their labour, all their effort - the Morphans will never get to enjoy it or benefit from it. It's simply for the benefit of the future generations.'

'So what exactly is the problem?' asked Amy.

'You're worried about the snow.'

'The process has gone wrong,' said the Doctor, quietly enough that neither Bel nor Samewell could overhear. 'For some reason, the terraforming programme has abruptly failed. Hereafter is becoming less and less Earth-like. The Morphans came here to

plant a nation, but now they're simply going to die out.'

'Why?'

'I don't know,' said the Doctor.

'You've got a hunch, though.'

'It could be that it was never meant to be,' said the Doctor. 'It could be that Hereafter was too difficult a world to convert. Or a fault might have developed in the main atmospheric processors. Or...'

'Or?'

'Nothing,' he said quietly.

'Or what?' she snapped.

'Really, nothing.'

She gave him one of her looks.

'All right,' he said. 'It could be... that there's some kind of influence at work here. I've seen... something like it before, once or twice.'

'What sort of influence?' asked Amy.

'Let's not worry about it until I'm sure,' said the Doctor. He began to stride along the snowy path between the trees with great purpose. 'Let's hope it's a glitch. A processing glitch that I can fix.'

'A glitch?' asked Amy, narrowing her eyes to look at him.

'Not even a glitch.'

'No?'

'Less than a glitch. Smaller than a glitch.'

'Glitch- *ish*?' she asked

'Exactly!' declared the Doctor. He looked back at Bel. 'Which way from here?' he called brightly.

Rory doubted he could run much further. His legs and lungs were hurting from the effort, and his heart was pounding. He could barely draw a deep enough breath. There was cold sweat on his spine under his clothes. This was certainly not the way he'd have chosen to spend Christmas.

He smelled something suddenly. It wasn't a strong smell at all, but against the clear, pure atmosphere of the woodland it stood out sharply. It was a warm smell, wet and metallic, like the linty steam of a laundrette, or the outflow of the industrial washing machines at the back of Leadworth hospital. What was that? What could possibly be warm and wet in a place so locked in by ice and snow?

He came through a stand of trees to a lip of rock. A bank fell away below him, thick with slithered snow. Below him was a river. It was quite broad, falling steeply down the rocky throat of a gorge to his right into the steep cut basin below him. The far side,

steeper than the one he stood on, was densely packed with trees.

The river, once it had cleared the jumbled, snowcovered undergrowth of the gorge, was ten or twelve metres across. It had frozen over with a thick crust of ice that had been overlaid with the previous night's snow. It looked like a broad stretch of pale concrete. The gorge clearly trapped cold air over the open stretch of water.

Rory glanced over his shoulder. The green thing was still in pursuit, trudging through the trees, occasionally raising a clamp-hand to snap branches out of its way. It was thirty metres behind him and closing. Rory had speed on his side, but not stamina. The thing just kept going. Rory knew he'd have to rest soon. He was exhausted, as if he'd run a marathon only to find there was no one waiting for him with a tinfoil blanket and a bottle of orange squash.

He made a snap decision. The density of trees on the far side of the river looked as though it offered the best chance of hiding he'd seen all day. The river was an added plus too. The green thing was big and evidently heavy. Rory doubted the ice, even though it looked like bullet-proof plate glass, would support a

weight like that.

He hurtled down the bank, almost falling and rolling. He kept his footing, skidding down the snow like a downhill skier. He picked his way through the snowy rocks and boulders by the river's edge, sliding on small, trapped puddles of ice, and reached the river.

Rory knelt down, reached out, and tested the ice with his hand. He applied firm pressure. It felt rock solid. As a nurse, he'd seen plenty of people brought into casualty with hypothermia and worse after falling through ice into ponds and lakes. Going out on ice was a stupid, stupid risk to take. Then again, none of the accident victims he'd seen being wheeled in on stretchers had taken to the ice because they were being chased by a two-metre tall, bipedal crocodile with baleful red eyes and a ray gun.

On cue, the green thing appeared at the top of the slope behind him. The afternoon sunlight flared off its pie-segment red lenses as it turned its ridged head to look at him.

Rory got up. He put a foot out onto the ice, let it take his weight, and then gingerly stepped clear of the bank. It was slippery, despite the dusting of snow. It felt like a window lubricated with washing up liquid

under his feet. He took one step, and then another, arms wide for balance, teetering. The ice beneath him creaked. It made the sorts of popping, squealing protests that polystyrene packing made when you got a new TV or microwave out of its box.

He wobbled. He took another step. Another. Another.

He glanced back. The green thing was coming down the slope after him, surefootedly negotiating the deep snow. It had a clear view of him. It could shoot him now. He was an open target.

He took another step. He took another. He was almost halfway across.

The ice gave out under him.

He plunged straight down into the river as though a trapdoor had slammed open underneath him. The moment he went, he knew he was done for. Even if the shock of the freezing water didn't actually kill him stone dead, he was miles from help and medical attention. His body temperature would drop sharply, and never recover. He would seize up and die.

He went under, right under the water. He was braced for the terrible cold. It was so cold, it seemed to burn him. Then he realised it wasn't cold at all.

The water under the crust of ice, fast-flowing and brisk, was warm. The water was *warm*.

Rory floundered, baffled. He struggled for the surface. Above him, he saw daylight. The ice had given way in several places, its disintegration prompted by the hole he had caused. The warm water was eating away at the edges of the plunge-hole, like a corrosive agent at work, broadening it and creating a channel.

He struck up towards it, arms churning, weighed down by his waterlogged parka. He broke the surface and took in a lungful of air. The cold stung his face. The warmth of the water was almost like a blessed relief from the gnawing ache of winter.

Spluttering, he started to tread water, the motion of the water rotated him in the ragged space he'd made in the ice cover.

He saw his monstrous pursuer. It had reached the bank and was staring out at him. He was right there in front of it, but it didn't seem to register him properly.

Heat, he thought. Heat. It was following my heat.

Now I'm in hot water, I'm harder to detect. It can still see me, but my thermal image is more difficult to isolate.

Rory took a deep breath and went under. He didn't

want to be visible at all. He wanted the water to mask him entirely.

'In hot water' indeed.

He wanted the river to carry him along and hide his trail from the creature.

For a moment, almost jubilant, he considered his luck. Falling through the ice had seemed to represent certain death, until he discovered the water beneath was warm. Being cornered in the water seemed to represent a second certain death, until it became apparent that the surrounding heat was confusing his implacable pursuer.

Then Rory realised there was a downside after all.

He swam underwater, borne along by the current, intending to surface for another lungful of air further downstream.

But he was under the ice again. He struck it from below, expecting it to splinter and give, but it was solid. It was as hard and firm as an oak lid on the top of the river. There was no air. There was no gap. There was no space for him to grab a breath.

He wasn't going to die of hypothermia or temperature shock. He wasn't going to be broken or blasted by a giant green monster.

He was simply going to drown.

Chapter

6

Deep and Crisp and Even

In the time it had taken them to trek through the shadowed snow of Would Be, the sky had changed colour. Looking up through the trees, Amy saw an expanse overhead that looked like wet slate. There was a whisper of cloud. A moody twilight had fallen across the wood.

Snowlight. She remembered it from her childhood.

A magical dusk where the ground seemed brighter than the sky, foretelling the imminent arrival of snow. It was an oddly fond memory, but in her current situation, it was not an exciting prospect.

A minute or so later, the first flakes started to fall.

They came down lazy and slow, just one or two at first, drifting like ash from an evening bonfire, or drowsy bumblebees.

'Button up!' declared the Doctor. 'Not far now.'

The snow grew a little heavier, but it was still pretty, like the picturesque flakes on a Dickensian Christmas card scene, rather than a full-on Scott of the Antarctic / March of the Penguins / 'I'm just going outside now, I

may be some time' thing.

Adjusting her mittens, Amy noticed how both Arabel and Samewell were intrigued by the falling snow. Neither of them had ever seen much of it, certainly not in its most fleeting, eerie state of actually falling out of the sky.

'It's a real novelty,' said the Doctor, noticing her interest. He had plucked up the collar of his jacket and was holding it closed with one hand.

'Like a Christmas single?' she asked, smiling.

'It doesn't mean it's a good thing,' he replied.

'So, just like a Christmas record, then?' she asked.

She watched Bel take off her glove and hold out a hand, letting flakes alight on her pink palm. Samewell grinned, and stuck out his tongue to catch a flake.

'What are you thinking about?' Amy asked the Doctor.

'I'm thinking about the little pockets of early human beings,' he replied quietly. 'Little communities of brave and determined hunter-gatherers, delighted by the unfamiliarity of snow and not even beginning to realise it's the first traces of an approaching ice age. Not even beginning to realise that what is enchanting now will starve them and freeze them and kill them inside six

months.'

He blew on his hands.

'Let's find this memory yard,' he said.

It wasn't far off. With the ghost snow falling as silently as moving stars, the clearing was hauntingly beautiful. It was also terribly melancholy. The Doctor reckoned that Would Be had been deliberately planted by earlier generations of Morphans. The little grey headstones looked like trees that had yet to flourish. Amy couldn't believe how many of them there were. They were like the rings of a tree. Add them all together, and they represented the toil and dedication that had gone into building Beside.

Bel took them to the marker of her father's grave. Though the snow was laying, it had not yet covered and hidden the jar and the little bunch of heathouse flowers.

'She was here,' said Bel. 'Only Vesta would do that.'

'You wouldn't do it?' asked the Doctor.

Bel seemed to think about replying, but didn't. She looked as though the answer was too sad or ordinary or unremarkable for her to say out loud.

'Bel would mean to,' said Samewell, 'but she's always so busy. We're all so busy. Vesta would

remember what day it was.'

The Doctor walked around the grave two or three times, a thumb under his chin and an index finger crooked across his mouth.

'There are only her tracks,' he said, pointing. 'Only hers. The snow's beginning to hide them. Look, that's her. Footsteps and the brush of long skirts. Just hers. Well, ours too now, but ignore them. She came up the way we came, up the path. She came up from the plantation. But she didn't go that way. She went off in the other direction.' He turned to Bel. 'Where else would she go?'

Bel shrugged. 'Nowhere. She'd have been late for work as it was. Guide's Bell would have rung. She would have just gone back.'

'What's this way?' the Doctor asked, following the line of swiftly vanishing footprints.

'Nothing,' said Samewell. 'If you go that way you'd eventually reach Farafield, I suppose. Firmer Number Three is roughly that way.'

'Only roughly,' said Bel.

They all squinted into the falling snow. The sky had darkened so much, it was hard to make out the gloomy shoulders of the mountains.

'She was going somewhere,' said the Doctor, leading the way briskly. The trail took them out of the memory yard and deep into the trees. He pointed at the ground as he walked.

'Look,' he called back. 'Straight line! She wasn't wandering, wasn't strolling around. A very deliberate straight line.'

'Maybe she saw something,' suggested Amy, close on his heels.

'Saw what?' asked Bel, following along with Samewell.

The Doctor stopped suddenly. 'That's also a very deliberate straight line,' he said. There was another line of prints in the snow, crossing Vesta's path like a 'T'. It was also fading in the snowfall, but not quite as fast because of the sheer size of it.

'What made those?' asked Amy, slowly and very cautiously.

'I don't know,' said the Doctor, hunkering down to examine them. He measured one out against the side of his hand.

'They're giant,' said Samewell. There was a catch of anxiety in his voice.

'Yes,' said the Doctor, 'they are.' He got up. 'They

were here first,' he said. 'She came upon the trail. Found it.'

'What are you, the last of the Mohicans or something?' asked Amy.

The Doctor looked at her.

'Baden-Powell taught me the rudiments of tracking,' he replied.

'Of course he did,' she replied.

'Chingachook merely refined some of my techniques,' said the Doctor.

'Chingachook's a fictional character,' Amy replied.

'Is he?' asked the Doctor.

'Yes, he is,' said Amy.

'Or was that just the deal Fenimore Cooper struck to get permission to write the story?'

'What are you talking about?' asked Bel.

'The real question,' Amy replied, still looking at the Doctor, 'is *why* are we talking about it, because it's a stupid conversation.'

'You started it,' said the Doctor. He turned back to the tracks. 'Look, she came up here, came across the tracks.'

'The giant tracks,' said Amy.

'The giant tracks, yes, and then she headed off back

into the woods. In a hurry.'

'Scared?' asked Bel.

'Maybe scared. She didn't retrace her steps, just went off in a hurry. Come on,' he added, and started to follow the new trail in a hurry.

'Slow down, Davy Crockett!' Amy cried, following.

'Davy Crockett was a terrible tracker!' The Doctor called over his shoulder. 'Lovely man. Nice hat. Very overrated in the tracking department.'

He came to a halt again. They'd reached a small clearing close to the northern end of the memory yard.

'What is it?' asked Amy.

'Oh dear,' said the Doctor.

'What is it?' Amy repeated.

'Something bad happened here,' said the Doctor quietly.

Samewell and Bel came up behind them.

'Is that..?' asked Samewell.

'That's blood,' said Bel.

The snow was falling heavily, but it hadn't quite managed to obliterate the dark stains soaked into the ground cover.

'Yes, it is,' said the Doctor. 'And I'm rather afraid there's an awful lot of it.'

Ten seconds before he drowned, Rory managed to right himself in the fast-flowing undercurrent, just long enough to hammer his fists against the roof of ice. It was like banging against the glass of a display aquarium. The noise was as muffled as the thud of his heart. Nothing yielded.

The light was strange under the filter of the ice. There was a sickly blue-green cast. The water, so curiously warm, swirling him along in a turbulent spiral of froth and twinkling air bubbles. He bounced. He up-ended. He glanced off the ice sheet, hurting his head.

Five seconds before he drowned, he failed to hit the ice with a last, frantic punch.

Three seconds before he drowned, the water flow accelerated and smashed him through some kind of submerged gate or shutter.

One second before he drowned, he stopped drowning and breathed again.

There was no ice.

He'd surfaced, with access to the wintery air. He gulped it in, as though he was drinking it, filling his burning, about-to-burst lungs. He went under again, remembered to tread water, and came up spluttering.

Blinking water out of his eyes, he tried to get his bearings. He was in a pool, like a large mill pond. Traces of slushy ice drifted on the surface, but it was generally unfrozen.

The river had brought him downhill under its frozen crust and thrown him through a sluice gate into the pond. He still couldn't fathom why the water, deep under its cooler surface layers, was warm. It had to be some kind of artificially heated flow, surely?

Whatever the answer, it wasn't his immediate concern. The unnatural warmth of the water had spared him from a numbing death, but he was still soaking wet outdoors on a snowy day. He had to get out, get dry, find shelter.

The pool, shadowed by mature trees, was flanked by buildings. They looked like they were made of wood and stone, with plates of grey metal. The drab side-walls were patched with green moss and lichen as though they had stood for years, and some of the metal pins and bolts had corroded green. The buildings overhung the pool, and parts of them extended out into the water like dams or the gates of a filtration plant.

Rory let the gentle current of the pool, its power slackened by the sluice, carry him towards the

projections. He caught hold of some metal pipework. The cold of it hurt his palms. He went down the frame, hand over hand, dragging himself through the water until he was close to a small metal jetty, then he heaved himself up out of the water. It felt like he weighed a ton.

Water streamed off him, pouring out of his saturated clothes as he stood up. Steam plumed off him. He could feel the cold biting into his skin, turning his clothes into heavy, clammy bandages.

He slopped down the jetty. The buildings were definitely water mills of some kind. The river had been directed via the sluices into the catchment pool so that it could drive turbine systems hidden in the utilitarian structures. The buildings seemed old, but the technology appeared modem. Rory had already got used to dismissing that kind of anachronism.

The sky had changed colour, as if it had soured like milk, and heavy snowflakes were starting to fall. Rory knew he had to get inside one of the buildings before he lost too much of his core body heat.

There were no immediate signs of a door.

He walked along the jetty, and then along a timber-planked service walkway between two of the

structures. There was no snow here, as though internal heat had kept it from laying. If he could only get inside...

It suddenly occurred to him to look around and check for signs of pursuit. He had no idea how far the river had carried him, but even the slightest chance that the green thing was still after him made his heart skip. He looked back up the pond towards the sluice, and towards the trees on the far bank. He saw nothing but green shadows and the snow, which was now falling quite fast.

Green shadows seemed perfect for a green thing to hide in, no matter how big it was.

He followed the walkway round. There had to be a hatch or an entrance somewhere.

He stopped. He heard something. He couldn't tell what it was. The crunch of a footstep? The creak of ice? The crack of a branch snapping under the snow's weight?

It was close. Had that thing located him again already? How had it caught up so fast? He crept a little further, encumbered by his soaked clothing. There was a hatch. Down the end of the walkway, there was definitely a hatch.

He took a look over his shoulder.

Just for a second, he saw the light reflect off red eyes. Just a glint, like the gleam of blood. Red eyes, out there in the enclosing darkness of the wood.

Red eyes searching for him.

He hurried towards the hatch. Looking back, he saw that the eyes had gone. He heard a noise. A footstep on a metal walkboard.

Something was on the jetty. Something was moving.

Rory reached the hatch. There was a recessed slot built to fit a human hand. He reached in and turned the rotator bar. The hatch unlocked. He pulled it open and went inside, not even caring what might lie within.

Warmth hit him, and darkness surrounded him. He heard another footstep on the jetty, closer. He dragged the hatch shut and locked it behind him.

He looked around. He was in some kind of machine space above one of the turbines. He could hear the rush of water and the cycle of a wheel or a screw system coming up from below. It was very dark, but it was a lot warmer inside than outside.

He crouched down inside the hatch. He could hear whatever it was moving outside. He could hear it walking along the jetty and then the timber planks. He

put his hand on the door bolt to stop it being turned from outside. Something came close to the hatch, went past, and then came back. He held his breath as it began to scrape and scratch at the recessed handle. He could hear a deep, rasping breath, a ragged, asthmatic wheeze.

It was trying to get in. It was trying to get in and get at him. It knew he was there.

The scraping and rattling grew worse, as if the thing outside possessed hands that were too big to fit the slot. It banged the hatch instead. The breathing became more laboured, a wet hiss from gurgling lungs.

The effort suddenly stopped. Rory waited, clasping the inside handle. He heard a noise, almost a voice, followed by movement.

Then the hideous discharge of the green thing's weapon, a repeated burst, squealed right outside. It made him jump. It hurt his ears. There was an impact. Something fell, or collided with something else heavy.

The weapon went off again.

Silence.

Rory waited for a long time, scarcely daring to move or breathe. He waited for some sign or clue from outside, but heard no further sounds.

When he had waited, unmoving, for what seemed like long enough, and then a bit longer just to be safe, he got up quietly and began to grope through the darkness to see if he could find a more secure hiding place further inside the structure.

He realised he wasn't alone in the building. He came to this realisation immediately after he managed to say the words 'Hang on', and immediately before something heavy smacked him across the side of the head and knocked him out.

Chapter

7

The Stars in the Night Sky

'Is it?' Amy asked quietly. Her voice was muffled because the snow had made her face numb, and also because she didn't want Samewell or Bel to hear her. For the same reason, she'd kept the question unspecific.

The Doctor glanced at her and shook his head.

Amy knew that was Doctor Code for *I have no idea, but I intend to retain a cautiously positive approach to the situation.*

'But it could be...' she asked, trailing off before she got to 'this girl we were looking for?'

The Doctor was crouching in the middle of the clearing, examining the stains soaked into the snow. His knees were on a level with his ears, so he resembled a frog on a lily pad.

Around him, the initially picturesque snowfall had become a full-scale blizzard. The density of flakes was making it hard to see anything, and the snow was quickly covering up all of the traces on the ground.

Amy hunched in her duffel coat with the hood up so

that it framed her face like a funnel. Samewell and Bel were watching them from the edge of the clearing, out of earshot. Bel was stricken with concern. Samewell was trying to keep her calm.

'I don't know, I don't know,' the Doctor muttered. 'I don't know. I hope it isn't.'

'We can't stay out here much longer,' said Amy, feeling the obvious needed to be stated at fairly regular intervals lest it slipped the Doctor's mind.

'I know we can't,' he said.

'Doctor, is it what you thought it was? This... *influence* you referred to?'

'No,' said the Doctor. 'That's the thing. This is odd. It doesn't fit. My hunch was clearly wrong. I mis-hunched. I've got to go back and start again.'

'So you're attempting a re-hunch?'

'Indeed.'

'Maybe it is just a glitch, after all?'

'No, Pond. A glitch, no matter how big, doesn't rip something apart and shower blood everywhere.'

'At least there isn't a body,' said Amy, encouragingly.

'There doesn't have to be,' said the Doctor. 'Whatever bled here, it bled enough to be dead. A body

could be lying close by and we'd never see it.'

He stood up quickly, snowflakes in his hair and eyelashes.

'Don't let Arabel look around,' he whispered to Amy. 'Keep her calm and keep her here. I don't want her... finding her sister.'

Amy nodded. Arabel was close by, a phantom in the falling snow, standing under one of the trees, lost in thought.

'Try to keep her occupied. Don't let her imagine the worst,' said the Doctor.

'I'll see if she knows anywhere in the area we could shelter,' said Amy.

'Good idea.'

Amy went over to Arabel. The Doctor continued to pace around the clearing, scrutinising signs and traces, as though he was in a laboratory where it just happened to be snowing.

Samewell came up to him. 'I found these over there,' he said quietly. He had some grisly objects in his hand, and he furtively showed them to the Doctor. They were almost black, like chunks of coal.

They *weren't* chunks of coal. They were pieces of bone, caked in blood.

'Oh dear,' said the Doctor.

'It's all right,' said Samewell. 'It's not Vesta. These are bits of backbone from a sheep.'

The Doctor took one of the sticky lumps out of Samewell's hand and examined it closely.

'I think you're right, Samewell. Vertebrae. Ovine.'

'I know sheep. It's my labour to watch the flocks and rear them.'

'It was a sheep,' murmured the Doctor, relieved.

'It was a sheep what was killed here,' agreed Samewell. 'Like the other livestock this winter. We think it's a dog run wild, Guide help us.'

'It's been eaten,' said the Doctor. 'Devoured. Reduced to a few bones.'

'A dog would do that,' said Samewell. 'A hungry dog.'

'Yes,' said the Doctor. 'But in just a few hours? This is fresh. It's happened since last night, because the stains are still in the snow. Can even a big, hungry dog eat an entire sheep in that time?'

Samewell regarded the question with some alarm. He was also beginning to look blue around the edges.

'We need to shelter somewhere,' said the Doctor. 'This weather's getting worse by the minute.'

'There's a vent,' Samewell told him. 'It's about a mile from here on the skirt of Would Be.'

'A vent?'

'A herder's hut. For when we take the flocks up past the woods onto Moreland in summer. Guide knows it's closer to us than Beside.'

'OK, good. We'd better get moving,' said the Doctor.

They started walking, heads down into the blow.

The snow was in their faces, hard and prickling.

Samewell knew the way.

As they trudged along, the Doctor thought about the word Samewell had used. *Vent.* Another Morphan neologism, presumably derived from the word for *wind*, as in a place where a herdsman could shelter from that elemental force. In Australia, they called them watch boxes, and in Norway they called them seters. On Umonalis Quadok where, admittedly, they herded ungulate ruminant thwentilopes rather than sheep, they called them Bimbemberabemhamshighans, which the Doctor had always thought was a rather ostentatious label for a one-room shack. In the highlands of Scotland, they called them bothies.

Snow always reminded the Doctor of Scotland. It was a place he was very fond of. Many years away -

not necessarily ago, because 'ago' was a clumsy concept to an inveterate time traveller - many years *away*, in a sideways direction that led to another part of his curiously structured life, the Doctor had visited Scotland and made a good friend there, a highlander called Jamie McCrimmon. Jamie had travelled with the Doctor for a while. They'd been to some places, and done some things, and on several occasions they had ended up in deep snow and deeper trouble. The thought of snow, and Jamie, took the Doctor back to his original, uneasy hunch. It was hard to shake, even though the evidence was no longer adding up.

'We should keep looking,' said Arabel.

'I can't even see my hands in front of my face in this,' said Samewell.

'She'll freeze,' said Arabel.

Samewell had his arm around her, leading her along and shielding her with his coat. 'Guide knows we won't be no use to her if we freeze first,' he said.

The Doctor stopped.

'What is it?' asked Amy. She was keeping her jaw clenched so her teeth wouldn't chatter.

'Something,' said the Doctor. He looked around. 'There's something nearby.'

It was hard to see for any distance. It was still snowing hard, and flurrying too, and Amy had a feeling evening had set in and taken over the responsibility for making things dark from the snowstorm. Constellations of snowflakes moving against the black trunks of nearby trees was about all she could make out.

'I don't see anything,' she said, wiping snow off her nose.

'Neither do I, but I feel it,' said the Doctor.

'What, like a sixth sense?'

'Much vaguer. Much, *much* vaguer. A ninth or tenth sense at best.'

He rotated on the spot again, flipped out his sonic screwdriver, scanned and then switched it off. He tapped the end of the screwdriver against his pursed lips as he thought.

'We should keep moving,' said Amy.

'We *should* keep moving,' agreed the Doctor.

'Samewell?'

'It's up this way, a bit further yet,' Samewell replied. 'We're close to the edge of Moreland now.'

There was a break in the trees, a thinning out where the snow was deeper on the ground. The snow was

beginning to drift.

The Doctor stopped again and took another look around. He divined with his warbling screwdriver again. 'Let's liven things up by walking a little faster,' he said, smiling.

The smile did nothing to take Amy's chill away.

'Hang on!' Rory said, sitting up.

Of course, it's far too late to say 'hang on!' once you've already been struck around the head with a blunt object and knocked unconscious. He said it nevertheless, and then groaned as the intense throbbing in his head introduced itself and let him know it would be staying for a few days.

'Ow,' he said, resting his forehead in his hand. 'Ow. Also, owww-www.'

'Don't move,' a voice warned him.

'Fine. I really haven't got much planned except sitting here and experiencing pain for the moment,' he replied. He shook his head in an effort to dispel the pain, and it worked in exactly the same way that shaking a snow globe makes it easier to see the scene inside.

'Owwwwww,' he breathed.

'Don't you move, or I'll hit you again,' said the

voice.

'Please don't do that,' said Rory.

'I didn't want to the first time,' said the voice. There was a waver of concern. 'I thought you were... *it*. '

'Really? Well, I'm not.'

'I see that now.'

'I'm glad we've cleared that up,' said Rory, 'but my head still really hurts. What did you hit me with?'

'This,' said the voice.

The mill shed was still dark, and the turbines were humming under the boarded floor, but the gloom was softened by a small metal lamp that had been turned down very low. By its little, amber glow, Rory could see the shapes of dusty machinery around him, and a figure crouching opposite. The figure was holding a wooden mallet.

'Great,' said Rory. Even talking hurt. 'That looks like a really solid thing to hit someone on the head with. I've probably got concussion.'

'I'll hit you with it once more if you don't hush.'

'Don't do that! Why would you do that?'

'Because I think it may still be outside.'

'It, you mean?'

'Yes. You must've seen it too.'

Rory nodded, and then added nodding to his list of Things To Avoid Doing.

'I did,' he said.

'Those red eyes...'

'Exactly,' said Rory. He felt his scalp gingerly, and found a lump the size of a quail's egg over his left ear that was so badly bruised just touching it made him want to say things that were not good out-loud words.

'It chased me,' he said instead.

'And me,' said the figure.

Rory shifted a little to prop himself up against the wooden base of some machine.

'Don't move or I will hit you!' the voice ordered.

'I thought we'd established I wasn't *it,'* said Rory.

'I don't know what you are,' said the figure with the mallet.

'Do I look like *it*?' asked Rory.

'No, but it is an unguidely thing, most *terribly* unguidely, so it may alter its looks with conjury. It may take on a disguise of deceit.'

'Does this look like a disguise someone would choose?' asked Rory, gesturing to himself. He squinted into the gloom. The lamp was turned down so far, all he could make out was a hooded and robed shape. And

the mallet.

'It doesn't seem likely,' the figure admitted.

'So could you put the mallet down?' he suggested.

'Or at least go to Defcon five with it?'

'You talk funny. What is your name?'

'Rory. I'm Rory.'

'Raw-ree? That's... that's an unguidely name, that is.'

'I'm sure it's not, but OK.'

'You're not from Beside, for I would know you.

What plantnation are you from?'

'Leadworth. I'm from Leadworth.'

'There is no plantnation called that!' the figure

declared.

'Do you know what? I think it's quite likely that

there are some *plant-nation*- things that you haven't

heard the names of.'

'That's not possible!'

'Well, you can hit me on the head with a mallet as

many times as you like, but it won't change the fact

that it is.'

There was a pause of indecision.

'So, wh-where is this plantnation on Hereafter?'

Rory looked at the hooded figure. 'No,' he said. 'I've

answered your question, I've told you my name, and I

think I've been pretty good about you hitting me on the head with a mallet, all things considered. Quite apart from anything else, I haven't had a particularly brilliant day. So I think you can answer a question for me next. Who are you?'

The figure hesitated, and then pulled down the hood. The lamplight picked out a face that was small and pale, and streaked with the tracks of tears that Rory was sure were the product of frustrated anger rather than weakness.

'I'm Vesta Flurrish,' she said.

'Ah,' Rory replied, recalling the words of the men who had accosted him. 'People are looking for you,'

The snowfall eased back enough to reveal that a winter's night was setting in. Thick banks of grey snow cloud, as coarse and dense as wire wool, slumped low across the sky, interspersed with clear, cold bands of evening. The occasional early star twinkled in the clear stretches, like fairy lights behind glass.

In the twilight of the late afternoon, the snowscape had turned violet and the trees mauve. The snow was like white noise, as though reality wasn't quite tuned in. The Doctor, Amy, Arabel and Samewell trudged through the edges of Would Be, hearing only the

crunch of their footsteps on the fresh snow and the puff of their breaths. Vapour trailed behind them with each exhalation. The Doctor knew they'd been out too long and had pushed too hard. They needed heat and shelter quickly. It was all very well for his Gallifreyan constitution, but human metabolisms were going to shut down very soon, with catastrophic consequences.

'You keep looking behind you,' said Amy.

'I do, don't I?' replied the Doctor.

'Why?'

'Just checking to see if it's snowing as badly there as it is in front of us.'

'Why *really?'*

'No reason.'

'What are you doing with the sonic?' she asked.

'Just re-setting it,' he replied.

'To what?'

'A different setting.'

'Why?'

'Just in case,' he said.

'In case of what?'

'Nothing.'

'Oh, I'm going to stupid well thump you if—'

'Look!' Bel cried.

They looked. She was pointing up at the sky, at a patch of clear night between cliffs of snow-bruised cloud. The stars were gleaming.

One of them was moving.

It made no sound. It was just a white light, no bigger than the other stars, but it was moving across the sky from east to west.

'I told you,' said Bel. 'Just like I saw before.'

'It's an aircraft,' Amy whispered to the Doctor.

'Too high up,' the Doctor replied. 'And besides, the good people of Beside do not possess aircraft.'

'What then?'

'Something in orbit,' said the Doctor.

'Like a spaceship?' asked Amy.

'Certainly something spaceship-esque,' he agreed.

She frowned at him.

'All right,' he said, 'something so much like a spaceship you may as well use the word "spaceship". My guess is, that's an interstellar craft in a distant parking orbit, but it could be some kind of lander or shuttle making a slow, shallow descent.'

'Doctor,' said Amy carefully, 'is this planet being invaded by something?'

'It's already been invaded,' the Doctor replied,

'twenty-seven generations ago, by the Morphans from Earth before. I think someone else has arrived to dispute that claim.'

Amy ignored the clever-clever nature of his answer. 'Seriously, this planet,' she said, choosing her words firmly so there could be no wiggle room in the answer, 'is about to get invaded?'

'No,' said the Doctor. 'The invasion started months ago. We're only just noticing it.'

'What are you talking about?' asked Bel, overhearing the last bit.

The Doctor stopped and held a finger to his lips.

The others stopped too, looking at him. The crunching of their footsteps stopped. They caught their breath for a moment as they tried to pick up what he was hearing. They could still hear crunching footsteps and they could still hear rasping breath. It just wasn't them. Bel's eyes widened. Samewell's jaw dropped. Amy looked at the Doctor sharply, silently demanding an explanation.

The Doctor looked around, checking every direction. He was the first one to see the figures emerging through the snow.

There were half a dozen of them at least, closing from behind, and from the left and right. Grey-green

shadows, they looked as tall and robust as tree trunks, except they were walking. Shambling. Trudging. There had to be a word for what they were doing, Amy was sure, but none of the ones she could dredge up seemed threatening enough.

The figures were massive. Their torsos were hugely bulky, and their fists were like pincers. Their eyes flashed red in the uncanny gloom.

Their breathing sounded like punctured bellows: long, wet, fluttering sounds.

'Turns out my hunch was right,' said the Doctor, though he didn't sound at all pleased to be vindicated.

'What are they?' asked Amy.

'They're unguidely!' Samewell cried.

'Get down!' the Doctor ordered.

'What are they?' Amy asked again instead of getting down.

'Oh, *get down!*'

'What *are* they?' Amy repeated.

'They're Ice Warriors,' said the Doctor.

Chapter

8

Certain Poor Shepherds

in Fields as They Lay

Amy looked at him blankly. 'Should I know what

that means?' she asked.

'No!' exclaimed the Doctor. 'But the basic principles

of "Get down!" ought to be pretty clear, even to you!'

The four of them dropped down low in the snow.

The towering green warriors had come to a halt about

ten metres away, forming a semicircle. Stationary, they

were entirely immobile, like statues. Snow actually

settled on their sculpted shoulders and ridged

craniums.

One of them slowly raised its right arm from beside

its hip. There was some kind of pipe attached to the

upper wrist. It pointed it at them.

The creature... the *Ice Warrior*... said something.

Amy could see taut, reptilian lips move under the rim

of the intimidating visor. She couldn't distinguish any

words. It sounded like air escaping under high pressure

from an inner tube.

'Keep down!' said the Doctor. He was frantically

fiddling with his sonic screwdriver.

The Ice Warrior fired its weapon. It made one of the most unpleasant sounds Amy had ever heard, and she'd heard quite a few that featured in the Universal Top Twenty. It was a throbbing sound that she could feel in her internal organs, a pulse that brutalised the air. The blast caused a vortex in the pattern of the falling snow, whizzing flakes in a sudden horizontal spiral. A stout tree directly behind the four of them shivered and shed collected snow as the energy struck its trunk. Bark cracked and shattered. Steam wafted from the traumatised wood.

'Guide's sake!' Samewell yelped.

'It was just a warning shot!' the Doctor told them. 'They want us alive.'

As if hoping to corroborate the Doctor's statement, the Ice Warrior spoke again. This time, Amy could identify a stretched and mangled word in the fierce pneumatic hiss.

'Sssssurrenderrr...'

The Doctor sprang up to face the towering aliens.

'Not today, thank you!' he cried.

'Doctor!' Amy cried.

The Ice Warrior aimed at the Doctor and fired, but

the Doctor had already activated his screwdriver. The warbling sound of the device seemed to strangle and cut short the ugly noise of the weapon.

The Ice Warrior hesitated, confused. It tried its weapon again, and this time it didn't make a sound at all. The Doctor kept his bleating screwdriver aimed at the giants. The Ice Warrior hissed a curt order, and the others of its kind took aim. They all fired.

None of the weapon tubes made a noise.

'Time to run!' the Doctor cried. 'Run away! Very fast!'

The others got up, hesitantly.

'Come on!' the Doctor yelled, still brandishing the warbling screwdriver at the Ice Warriors. 'The screwdriver's generating sound waves with the opposite polarity to the output of their weapons, cancelling the noise - oh, just run, *please!* It won't work much longer!'

They all started to run.

'The other way, Samewell!' Amy ordered.

Samewell turned and started to run with them instead of towards the Ice Warriors. Shock had rather robbed him of his wits. Arabel gathered up her long skirts to run more easily. The four of them dashed

through the snow between the looming trees, the Doctor bringing up the rear, directing the output of his screwdriver behind him.

The Ice Warriors immediately started to pursue them, striding out across the snow.

'We're leaving them behind!' Amy yelled, looking back.

'Yes,' agreed the Doctor, 'but they won't get tired!'

His screwdriver suddenly went quiet and the claspers retracted and shut. The Doctor shook it and tapped it against his palm as he ran.

That's all well be getting out of it for a while!' he shouted. 'Keep running, and don't let them get a clear shot!'

Behind them, they heard a tube weapon pulse. A slender tree a few metres to Amy's left exploded midtrunk and the top half sheared away. Amy squealed, ducked, and then leapt over the fallen section as it collapsed in her path.

'Down here! This way!' the Doctor urged. Two or three more unpleasant pulses thumped out behind them. Another tree fractured. The top of a snowdrift behind Samewell went up like an explosion in an cotton wool factory.

Ahead of them, the trees were thinning out. They had reached the edge of Would Be and the start of the open grazing land beyond, the region Samewell had called Moreland.

No trees meant no cover. If they carried on, they would be sitting ducks.

'I went out this morning to put flowers on my dad's grave,' Vesta Flurrish told Rory quietly. They had turned the solamp up slightly. Apart from her voice, the only sounds were the cycle of the turbines underneath them, and the tick of ice-heavy flakes hitting the roof and wall of the shed. It was snowing hard outside.

'I meant to be back before Guide's Bell, of course,' said Vesta. 'But it is a long way up to the memory yard in this weather. The yard is in Would Be. Do you know it?'

'I'm not from around here,' said Rory.

She nodded. 'Well, I was there, and I was just leaving, and then I saw the star move.'

'A star?'

'Yes.'

'Moving?'

'Yes. A moving star. It went by in the sky. Beautiful it was. Like a sign.' Her face fell as she thought about

it. 'Like an omen. That's what they say. Bel saw it.'

'Bel?'

'My sister, Arabel. Other Morphans have seen it too. All this winter long. A star of ill omen, moving as it pleases. They say it presages the bad things that have been happening. The cold. The killing.'

'The killing?' asked Rory.

'Of livestock. Have you seen the moving stars from your plantnation?'

'No.'

'Oh,' she said. 'Anyway, I followed it for a while to see what it would do. I followed it further into Would Be, and that's when I came upon the tracks in the snow. The giant tracks. They scared me a lot. I didn't know what to make of them. I prayed that Guide might protect me, and I ran. And then...'

'Then?' Rory asked.

'I sort of ran straight into it there in the wood.'

' *It*?'

'That's right.'

'With the red eyes?'

'As Guide is my witness,' said Vesta.

'It's certainly a scary thing to meet' Rory agreed.

'I was sore afraid,' Vesta nodded. 'It snatched at me,

but I ran. I ran and ran and ran.'

'Did it shoot at you?' asked Rory.

'Shoot?'

'With a gun?'

'No. I didn't know it had a gun. We do not have guns in the plantnation. They are things that fire pellets, aren't they?'

'Sort of,' Rory replied. 'It shot at me.' He thought for a moment. 'Actually, the funny thing is, it didn't. I met these men who must've been looking for you, and because they didn't know me, like you didn't, they thought I was pretty suss.'

'They thought you were what?'

'Dodgy... um... they wanted to know who I was and what I was doing. Then it came along, and there was a terrible fight. It shot at some of the men. It had this horrible... *sound gun*. It was like it was firing sound. I can't explain it better. I think it hurt some of them. I think it might have killed some of them.'

'Oh save us all!' said Vesta. 'It killed people from Beside?'

'I think it might have done. I'm sorry.'

'Who were they?' she asked.

'I don't know,' Rory said, a little helplessly. 'I didn't

know their names. We'd only just met. In the confusion, everybody scattered. I ran. Like you, I just ran. And it could have shot me too, but it didn't. It just chased me.'

'Like it wanted... to catch you?'

Rory nodded. His throbbing head reminded him what a bad idea that was, and he winced. 'That had occurred to me,' he said. 'It's not a nice thought. I have been wondering why. Anyway, I ran.'

'And that's how you ended up at the autumn mills?'

'Where?'

She laughed. 'Here! The autumn mills!'

'OK. I didn't know what they were called.'

Vesta's long skirts were torn and dirty. She idly smoothed them out over her knees.

'I came here because it was the closest place I could think of to hide in,' she said. 'I ran a long way just to get away from it. By the time I even thought about which way I was going, I realised I'd gone off opposite to where Beside was. I was a Cat A fool for doing that. I got my bearings and figured that the autumn mills would be the best bet for a roof and shelter and warmth.'

'Why is the water warm?' Rory asked. 'Even under

the ice, there's heat in it. I know because I fell through the ice.'

'No wonder you look like a compost heap,' said Vesta. She shrugged. 'The water's warm because it flows into the streams from the Firmer. These streams, it would be Firmer Number Two, actually. It's a thermal exchange system. Guide teaches us that water is used in the Firmers for cooling, and then sent out, and the mills harvest the heat to store in the plantnation's conservator reservoir. Light and wind and water, we borrow power from all. The mills take power autumnatically from the streams.'

'How... how do they do it?' asked Rory.

'Autumnatically.'

'Automatically?'

'Say it proper! Autumnatically! Didn't you get schooled where you were raised?'

'A little.'

She peered at him, as if trying to read things in his face. Just having someone to talk to seemed to have perked her up, and reduced the trauma of what had clearly been an unpleasant day. Rory had seen that process work many times. A little chat, a chance to say things out loud.

'What labour do you do, Rory?' she asked. 'Let me guess. Are you a shepherd?'

'No.'

'Then a plantsman. That's it! A plantsman.'

'No, actually I'm a nurse.'

Vesta gazed at him, bewildered. 'A nurse? You're a nurse?'

'Yes.'

She leapt up, brushing her clothes down, her head bowed. 'Oh my Guide! I am so ashamed! So ashamed of my comportment!'

'Whoa, what?' asked Rory, getting up.

'You are an elect, an elect, and I show you no courtesy or respect! Oh goodness, and to think I struck you on the head too!'

'Calm down. Please, calm down. It's all right.'

She looked at him uneasily. 'I didn't know. Honest, and may Guide strike me down. I had no idea. You look too young, and you do not have a beard either.'

'I can understand how you made the mistake,' said Rory.

'Were you coming to visit us at Beside?'

'Yes,' said Rory.

'For the festival?'

'The festival...?' he asked.

'The winter festival.'

'Yes,' said Rory firmly, nodding. 'That's why we'd come. To celebrate.'

'You weren't on your own then?'

'What?'

'You said "we",' said Vesta.

'I did, didn't I?'

'Obviously someone as important as the Nurse Elect of a plantnation wouldn't travel alone. That would make no sense.'

'It wouldn't, would it?' asked Rory.

'So where is the rest of your party?'

'It was just a small group. Three of us... travelling from, um, afar,' said Rory. 'The Doctor and... another person. We got lost and separated.'

'How terrible, Elect,' she said. 'I hope they are all right.'

'So do I,' Rory agreed.

'We used to have wellwishers every year for the festival, but not since the winters turned white. The Morphans of Beside will be overjoyed that you have made this effort for the festival. We should go. We should go at once.'

'To Beside? Now?'

'Yes,' said Vesta. She was very earnest. 'This mill is quite secure, I suppose, but I do not wish to spend the night here, not with it out there. It is late, and it is cold, but if we go together and walk with purpose, we might make it in an hour.'

'OK,' said Rory. 'What about my friends?'

'We must hope Guide watches out for them,' said Vesta.

The Ice Warriors moved surprisingly fast for such big creatures. They weren't running, but their stride rate had increased. They pursued the Doctor and his companions out of the tree-line and onto the soft snow dunes of the open grazing. Their gait was powerful and sure-footed even on the softest snow, as though they were evolved to excel in such conditions. It felt as if they could stride for ever, and knock down anything that got in their way, and no matter how fast you fled, eventually they'd catch up with you when you collapsed of exhaustion.

"This way!' Samewell shouted, running ahead into the open ground. Lazy snowflakes billowed around him, spilling from a sky as dark as wet granite. 'Come on!'

'No! No! No!' the Doctor yelled. He was still fiddling with his sonic screwdriver as he ran. 'Not that way! Keep to the trees!'

Samewell was not going to be deterred, and Arabel was following him closely. Either he knew what he was doing, or he'd entirely taken leave of his senses, especially the one relating to direction. Given that surprise had almost sent Samewell running *towards* the Ice Warriors when they first appeared, the Doctor was not filled with confidence.

The sonic screwdriver started chirruping again. He aimed it at the Ice Warriors, neutralising the lethal blasts of their sonic weapons, and bounded on after the others.

Samewell had led them towards some kind of gully. He did know what he was doing after all.

There were some steep ditches and sunken stream beds in the slopes between the wood and the gently rising Moreland. Snow-cover had softened them into narrow channels and defiles, blended invisibly into the whiteness. Amy and the Doctor found themselves slithering down a deep bank behind Arabel and Samewell, and then slogging along a winding channel out of view of the edge of the wood. There were a few

lonely trees and coarse bushes, coated in snow, and large snow-dusted boulders jutted out of the frozen stream bed.

Arabel slipped and half-fell, but Amy grabbed her and pulled her up again. They kept running.

The Doctor's screwdriver didn't. It puttered out again. They could hear the Ice Warriors descending the bank behind them, but they couldn't see them.

Samewell led the fugitives along another channel, and then through a gentle basin where a lip of rock crowned with a gnarled tree overhung. Hard snow, driven by the wind across Moreland, blew down into their faces like sleet.

Samewell gestured urgently for them to keep following him. He scrambled up another bank, cascading powder snow in all directions, and led them back onto a raised stretch of the grazing.

There was a hut ahead of them. It was quite small, round, with a conical roof. Snow had drifted against its northward face. It was the shelter Samewell had told them about. It was the vent.

The Doctor felt an acute rush of pity. Samewell had been trying so hard. His solution to them being lost out in the snow was to lead them to the vent. His solution

to them being chased by murderous Ice Warriors was the same plan, unmodified. A vent provided shelter and safety for a herder. That was the way Samewell's mind worked.

As they got closer, the Doctor rapidly revised his opinion. The vent was made of metal. The entire structure was composed out of shipskin. If they could bar the door, it might indeed protect against Ice Warriors.

'Get inside!' he shouted.

The four of them blundered into the vent. It was dark and cold inside, and smelled of straw, but it was surprisingly dry. Samewell swung the metal door shut behind them and dropped the bolt.

They looked at one another in the gloom. It was so dark, they could discern only the faintest shapes. All of them were panting and out of breath.

'Wait now,' said Samewell.

He fumbled along the wall of the vent behind the door and found a rack containing small solamps. He turned one of the lamps on. The inside of the vent was a circular chamber about six metres in diameter. There were shelves with pots and pans, a small stove, two battered sleeping cots and a chair. The floor looked like

it was impacted earth covered in dried rushes or straw.

It was almost cosy.

The sense of cosiness vanished the moment they heard the first mighty pincer-fist smash against the vent door. The blows came one after another, brutally hard against the metal, vibrating the door and the wall beside it. The Ice Warriors were determined to smash their way in.

The metal will keep them out for a bit,' said Amy.

'Shipskin is strong,' said Bel.

'So are Ice Warriors,' replied the Doctor. He had taken the lamp off Samewell and was looking around, searching desperately for some kind of inspiration, some cue that might prompt invention or improvisation, anything to get them out of a small, exit-less structure that was, at best, a temporary refuge and, at worst, a hut-shaped death-trap.

'Houdini built a career out of this,' he said encouragingly as his mind raced.

'Of being trapped in a smelly shed under attack from Ice Men?' asked Amy.

'Of escaping from tight places from which there was no obvious mode of egress,' replied the Doctor. He took a cup off a shelf, looking inside it, and then gave

up on that line of thought. 'And it's Ice *Warriors*.'

Amy glanced at the door, which was quivering with every dull blow from outside.

'Uh-huh,' she said. 'Is that going to matter, in the long run? Ice Men? Ice Warriors? Ice Homicidal Freaks, who are still going to do us in whatever we call them?'

'True,' said the Doctor. He flipped the chair over to check its underside. 'Funny thing,' he said, 'no one ever gets their name right. Not even them. I mean, as I remember it, it was a friend of mine called Victoria that first called them Ice Warriors. Then they started to refer to themselves as Ice Warriors. It's confusing. If the cap fits, I suppose.'

'You've met them before?' asked Amy.

'Several times. Not for a long while, actually. Anyway, nice to see they're still entirely Ice-ish and Warrior-esque.'

'Are they enemies of yours?' asked Arabel.

'No,' said the Doctor, getting down to look under the cots. The hammering at the hatch had grown more intense. 'Yes. Sometimes.' He shrugged. 'They are an ancient and proud culture. One of the great pan-world civilisations in this part of the galaxy. Much to be

admired about them. Great code of honour. Of fairness. Then again, they are pragmatic and resolute. They fight for survival and they fight without quarter. It's very dangerous to be on the wrong side of them.'

'How many times have you been on the right side of them?' asked Amy.

'Oh, a couple of times at least.'

'And the other times?'

The Doctor looked at her.

'Those didn't go so well,' he admitted.

'What are they doing here?' asked Amy.

'The same thing as the Morphans, I should imagine,' the Doctor replied, standing on the chair to examine the ceiling, 'shopping for a new home. If Earth and its solar system are gone, forcing a migration of human colonists, then Mars has gone too.'

'Why does that matter?'

'Because that, Amy Pond, is where they come from,' he said.

'Mars?'

'Yes.'

'They're Martians?'

'Yes.'

She stared at him. 'You're actually, seriously telling

me, with a straight face, they're green men from Mars?'

'I know,' the Doctor said. 'It's ironic, isn't it? Of course, they're not *little* green men. That would just be silly. They're nice and big.'

Amy looked at the door. The last few savage blows had actually begun to dent the metal around the bolt.

'Big and strong all right,' she said. 'Strong enough to start bashing the door in. They're buckling the metal.'

'That's shipskin!' protested Samewell. 'It's the strongest metal we have!'

'It *is,* isn't it?' mused the Doctor.

He didn't seem at all distracted by the incessant banging from the door. He stamped the heel of his right foot against the hard-packed ground, moved a short distance and did it again.

'And that's the interesting part,' he went on. 'Shipskin's the toughest material you've got. It's rare. It's a precious commodity.'

'So?' asked Amy.

'So why did the Morphans build a shepherd's hut out of it?' asked the Doctor. He stamped his heel again and began to grin.

'What have you found?' Amy asked.

'As usual, the obvious!' he announced. He dropped

to his hands and knees and started to rake up the earth floor with his fingers. 'Come on! Help me! Before they knock that door in!'

They all got down and started to scrape the soil away with him. There was something under the dirt, just a few centimetres down. Something metal.

'It was surprisingly dry in here,' said the Doctor, working fast. 'That's the first thing I noticed. Dry. And made of metal. Well, made of metal was the first thing I noticed. Then I thought, why's it so dry in here?'

'You're gabbling,' Amy said.

'Sorry,' said the Doctor.

There was a particularly loud bang from the door. Part of the lip had folded in. They could see a massive green pincer clamping at the frame, trying to prise it open.

'It's obvious,' the Doctor said. 'I was over-thinking it! The Morphans don't call this a vent because it's a derivation of a word for wind, they call it a vent... because it's a vent!'

They had dug away and exposed a large hatch in the floor. The Doctor brushed dust and dirt out of a latch mechanism.

'Hurry!' advised Amy looking at the door.

'This is an exhaust outlet,' said the Doctor, 'venting warm air from the underground systems. It's part of the large scale terramorphing mechanisms built under the landscape here. There are probably hundreds of them all over the countryside. The Morphans have come to use them as huts because they're usually warm and dry. They don't remember what they were originally.'

Amy looked at the doorway. Part of the door was bent inwards and a great deal more of it was bulging. Two sets of large green pincers were now visible, trying to shear the bolt away from the frame.

'Really hurry!' she said.

The Doctor adjusted his screwdriver, ratcheted around a setting and aimed it at the latch. It made a rather sickly and pathetic noise. He shook it and banged it against his hand.

'I drained so much power noise-cancelling the Ice Warrior weapons,' he sighed. 'It's feeling rather sorry for itself. It just wants to sit in a pocket quietly and recharge. Come on,' he whispered to the screwdriver. 'Just do this, and I won't bother you again all day.'

'Doctor!' Amy cried.

Another formidable bash from the doorway had begun to deform the bolt.

The Doctor aimed the screwdriver carefully again, clicking the base end of it with his thumb as though it was a ballpoint pen. The sonic burbled, flashed, and then maintained a steady, whirring cycle. Three green lights winked on in series across the latch unit, and the hatch released with a clank and a hiss.

They hoisted it up. It lifted on one heavy-duty hinge like a submarine's front door. It revealed a vertical metal shaft that descended into darkness. There was a metal ladder fixed down one side.

'Go! Quickly!' the Doctor urged.

'Where does it lead?' asked Arabel.

'Away from here,' replied the Doctor, 'and that's probably it's most appealing quality at the moment. Go!'

Amy scrambled onto the ladder and started to descend. Arabel followed her, and then Samewell. The Doctor held the hatch lid up, and then followed Samewell as soon as the lad had gone down a few rungs.

Behind him, a final brutal blow broke the door in. It squealed open on mangled hinges and snow swirled into the vent. An Ice Warrior filled the doorway, staring with malevolent yet expressionless red eyes.

The Doctor clattered down the first few rungs,

pulling the hatch lid down after him.

It had almost engaged in the shut position when a

green pincer caught the edge of it and wedged it open.

With an exclamation of alarm, the Doctor pulled

down.

The Ice Warrior pulled up.

No contest.

Chapter

9

The Night is Darker Now

The Doctor grabbed the underside handle of the hatch with both hands, teetering on the edge of a rung. He dragged down on it as hard as he could, teeth clenched, eyes closed. Below him, climbing down the ladder as fast as they could go, Amy, Arabel and Samewell looked up and called out in dismay.

The Ice Warrior simply flipped the hatch up as easily as if he was opening the lid of a wheelie bin.

The hatch went up, and the Doctor went with it. He was pulled clean off the rung he'd been standing on. He dangled for a nanosecond from the handle, his legs hanging free and driving the pedals of an invisible bicycle.

Then he lost his grip.

The Doctor dropped like a stone. The sudden release of his weight jerked the hatch out of the Ice Warrior's clamp of a hand, and it fell shut. There was a click as the latch engaged.

The Doctor was in no position to appreciate that the Ice Warriors had just been shut out. He was simply in a

position of falling crazily down the vent shaft with his legs and arms waving. He hit Samewell first, knocking the young man off the wall ladder. Samewell barely had time to grunt in surprise. They were falling together when they hit Arabel, who was immediately below Samewell. The impact took her off the ladder too. She held on by one hand for a second, but couldn't retain her grip. Then she was falling with them.

All three of them, a tumbling, yelping bundle of limbs and bodies, collided with Amy, who was the lowest of the four. Her feet slipped off the rungs of the ladder, but she managed to retain her grip. The elastic strap connecting her mittens through the sleeves of her duffel coat caught on the rung for a moment, just long enough for her to plant her grip.

The Doctor, Samewell and Arabel plunged past her and vanished into the darkness of the shaft below.

'Oh my god! Oh my god!' Amy babbled, hauling herself back onto the ladder properly, and tilting to gaze down at the drop below. 'Oh my god! Doctor! Doctor!'

Her voice echoed back. There was no other sound. There was no reply. There was no reassuring answer, no *It's OK Amy, we landed safely on this convenient*

mattress.

On the positive side, there was no sound of impact either.

Amy swallowed hard, shocked by the disastrous turn of events. She called out their names again, and clambered down a few rungs. Then she went back up two steps, unhooked her mitten elastic, and started again.

There was a resounding clang from up above. The Ice Men had started work on the hatch.

Ice *Warriors*, she told herself, Ice-stupid-well *Warriors*.

She started to climb down as fast as she could. Several times she went too fast and slipped. The shaft seemed to go down for ever. They were going to be so dead when she finally reached them. It was going to be upsetting, and very messy, and then she was going to be alone with only Ice Men for company.

Warriors. *Warriors!*

She carried on down, running out of puff from the exertion. Despite the Doctor's earlier pledge that the day would be full of Christmas fun, and there'd be an absolute minimum of unnecessary shouting and running about, it had turned out to be the exact

opposite. Things really had to stop ending up like this. The universe was a beautiful, amazing and enthralling place, and she wanted to travel widely and enjoy it, preferably in the alive company of her husband and her good friend the Doctor. Amy was beginning to believe that she wasn't getting the most out of the universe by touring it at speed, and viewing it in passing. There was never any time to look at things. There only ever seemed to be time to glimpse things while running away from other, more pressing, things.

Amy stopped. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath and blew it out. Her mind was in totally flippant mode because she was trying to block out the idea that she had just seen the Doctor fall to his death, along with two other people she didn't know particularly well but had good reason to believe were nice and entirely undeserving of death by highspeed ground.

She opened her eyes and started to climb down again, breathing hard, trying to bolster her confidence. The steady, brutal clanging from the hatch far above wasn't helping much.

They wanted in, and they wanted in now, did those Ice Men. Warriors. *Warriors.*

She ignored the banging and scraping, and kept

going, one rung at a time, hand-and-foot, hand-and-foot, down and down. How far did this place go?

Amy became aware that there was something different about the shaft below her. It was hard to tell what at first. She grimaced and really hoped it wasn't a *decorated with splatted bodies* type of different.

Fortunately, it wasn't.

The ladder was coming to an end. The rungs ran out at a point where the whole shaft began to gently tilt to the left, like a drainpipe. It went from a straight vertical to a 35-degree drop with a very smoothly engineered bend like a joint in a piece of guttering.

She felt a distant breeze, cool and fresh coming up from below. The shaft seemed to be full of sound, sound just waiting for a chance to echo.

She stepped off the last rung and steadied herself on a sloping floor that, three metres higher up, had been wall.

'Doctor?' she called.

The echo came back to her. She edged forward.

It was quite tricky to walk on the angled floor. She struggled to keep her balance. The Ice Warriors continued to hammer and gouge at the hatch high above her.

The tube reminded her of something. She realised what it was. It was like a giant version of those water slides they had at big leisure centres, those great big, slaloming tube rides that Rory loved so much. It was just like that.

Or it was like an oversized version of those hamster playpens people bought from pet shops on the assumption that hamsters liked that sort of thing.

She wasn't convinced they did. If this was typical of the experience, it wasn't much fun and she could begin to appreciate the generally surly demeanour evinced by many hamsters.

She edged her way along. There was still no sign of the Doctor or Arabel or Samewell. They must have come all the way down and then shot off around the bend like Rory on a monster waterslide. Or a surly hamster doing hard time in a transparent plastic penitentiary.

'Doctor?' she called again, leaning forward to peer into the darkness, combing her hair out of her eyes with her fingers. 'Doctor? Give us a shout if you're OK, yeah? Doctor?'

Behind and above her, the Ice Warriors turned their sonic blasters on the unyielding latch and blew it to

pieces. The awful noise of the blast reverberated down the shaft to her and made her jump. Her foot slipped. She kept her balance.

She looked back the way she had come. She heard the ruptured hatch shriek open and saw shadows move in the light shining down the vent shaft.

The Ice Warriors were in. They were Ice Warriors, and they had opened the hatch, and they were inside the shaft, and they were coming after her. There was not a single part of that summary that didn't utterly terrify her.

She had to hurry. She took another step, another, moving faster.

Her foot slipped. She steadied herself again. Then both feet slipped at once, and this time she did not keep her balance.

Amy went over on her backside.

'Ouch!' she cried. Then she realised that falling on her bum was not going to be the worst of it.

She was moving. She was sliding. She was travelling down the shaft.

She protested aloud, to no one in particular, and started to paddle and scrabble with her hands and feet. To no avail. She was picking up speed. She was sliding

down the shaft as if it was a chute, on her bottom, like Rory on a monster stupid waterslide. She couldn't stop herself. She couldn't get up.

Gaining speed with every passing second, Amy rode the slide, helplessly, deeper and deeper underground.

Snow was falling. It was the blackest kind of night Rory had seen in a long while, cold and enclosing, giving nothing back. Big flakes of snow just seemed to hurtle blindly out of the darkness, zooming at him.

He was following Vesta through the snowy woods. She had brought her little solamp, but they had agreed to try travelling without it on for as long as they could. A light could attract the wrong kind of attention. Vesta had assured Rory that she knew which way to go. She knew the woods. She knew how to get them to Beside. Rory believed she meant it, but he was still worried. They had left the comforting heat of the autumn mills - *automills,* surely? - behind them and set out into a frozen night. There was a very good chance they would die of cold before they got anywhere, and that was without factoring in the *it* with red eyes that was out to get them.

His clothes had dried out during their stay in the warmth of the mill. He was glad of his coat. He wasn't

convinced it had been worth going back to the TARDIS for it. Maybe the day would have turned out to be rather less *energetic* if he'd stayed with Amy and the Doctor. Then again, he had no way of telling what sort of adventures they'd been getting up to. He had a fond notion that they would arrive at Vesta's village, Beside, and find the Doctor and Amy already there, already firm friends with everybody, telling stories, sitting by a hearth, eating hot food. His fond notion had a giant Christmas tree in it too, so he knew some of the details were completely fanciful, but he had hopes.

Rory was also a realist. He tried to count the number of times they had arrived anywhere, by accident or design, and not stumbled into some predicament or other. The only answer he could come up with was zero. It was inevitable, as inevitable as the wheeze of the TARDIS's console, as inevitable as the Doctor's sudden grin of insight. These predicaments, Rory believed, naturally attached themselves to Time Lords. In fact, with only one Time Lord left, there was probably a serious backlog of predicaments waiting to be attached. Danger, problems, plight, peril... He wouldn't be particularly surprised to learn there was

some sort of detector circuit aboard the TARDIS that automatically drew them towards trouble. The Doctor would probably admit it one day, casually, as though he thought they already knew. 'You mean I didn't tell you about the Predicament Seek-O-Matic Module? I didn't? I could have sworn... Should I switch it off for a change? Yes, why not? I'll switch it off.'

Snowflakes continued to stream out of the darkness, become suddenly visible, and hit him in the face. They were like stars. It was like rushing through the cosmos. It was piercingly cold and blindingly dark, and all he could see were little bright white objects speeding by. It was like travelling through the universe in the TARDIS and, like the TARDIS, there was no way of knowing exactly where you were going, or how safe it would be when you got there.

Amy was travelling at speeds in excess of anything she was comfortable with, especially given the fact that she wasn't riding aboard anything like a bike or a skateboard or a luge or a rocket ship, and she wasn't in any way in control at all.

The lining of the tube felt frictionless, and resisted her frantic attempts to grab hold of something or stop herself. The pitch was also increasing, dropping her

down a raked slide even steeper and more alarming than before. Eyes wide, hair flying out behind her, she zoomed down the tube. She realised it was the sort of ride that she might have enjoyed under other circumstances, none of which were presently operating. She also realised she was making desperate, strangled noises like 'agh' and 'eek' and 'yrk'.

Then she flew out of the mouth of a tube and landed on a bed of soft, dusty material. She bounced and came to a halt. Coughing, she slowly got to her feet. Her impact had puffed a huge cloud of dusty fibres out of the mass. She was in a small metal chamber, and the dusty material was a thick mass of leaf mould and vegetable fibres that had been sucked into the vent system and had accumulated there to rot. It had probably saved her from serious injury.

Still coughing, she glanced back up the dark tube of the vent system.

'I am *not* doing that again,' she said.

Her feet, striving for some autonomy, chose that moment to skid out from under her and prove her wrong. She slipped, fell down on her rear end again, and shot away down the next extension of the tube system, 'eek'-ing helplessly.

'Not fun!' she yelled at the top of her voice, experiencing an even sharper, steeper, faster ride than before. The tube twisted at one point and almost inverted her, before finally ejecting her into another chamber lined with deep, springy and slightly musty leaf matter.

Amy got to her feet a great deal more carefully than she had after her previous landing. She thought for a moment that she might have damaged her shoulder or back, because it was difficult to straighten up, but then discovered that this had less to do with a sprain or dislocation, and more to do with the fact that she was standing on one of her elasticated mittens.

She let the mitten ping out from under her foot, straightened up properly, and stared into the gloom around her whilst combing bits of dead leaf out of her hair with her fingers.

'Doctor?' she called. 'Doctor?'

The metal chamber, plain and grey and boxy, had several exits, all of which were further tube mouths. She edged around, making sure not to slip and plunge off on another escapade.

'Doctor?'

One of the vent tubes ran for a horizontal section,

and there was a kind of fluted duct to one side that she clambered through. She was now in a hallway. It was long, metallic and dark. The air was cool but dry. A small amount of ambient light was issuing from recessed lamps in the wall. The lamps looked like smaller and more sophisticated versions of the lights the Morphans used, the devices they called *solamps*. The glow reminded Amy of the output of solar garden lights that had been on all night and were beginning to tire.

'Doctor? Hello?'

There hadn't been much opportunity to argue with where the tube was taking her, so she wondered how the Doctor, Bel and Samewell could have ended up anywhere else.

Amy listened hard to see if a faraway voice might be answering her calls, and realised she could hear something. It was a humming, a deep resonance. She could feel it more than she could hear it. It was the sound immense machinery made, the steady industrial purr of automation, heard from a distance. It felt as if she was inside a huge factory, the biggest factory ever built, and all the machinery, whirring and chugging away, was hidden from view behind the metal skin of

the walls around her.

Then she thought, *Maybe I'm inside the actual machine. Maybe I'm inside some kind of pipe or tube or channel, and it seems giant to me, but that's only because the machine's so big. Maybe it's going to suddenly fill with... water or oil or liquid waste or atomic sludge or energy. Maybe it shoots down here at regular intervals as part of the machine's operation, and I've simply arrived between those intervals, and if I stay here much longer I'm going to get drowned or washed away or burned to a frazzle or irradiated, or—*

Amy began to panic. She began to feel very, very claustrophobic. She hurried along the hallway-that-might-also-be-a-pipe looking for an exit, or a door, or at the very least something to get up onto.

She found something else instead.

A scratching sound, a skittering noise, a flash of light in the shadows, just a glint.

'Who's that? Who's there?' she asked boldly.

Experience had taught her that being bold often helped. Well, not so much as bolshie. Whatever, it made her feel better anyway.

Then she saw what was making the sound. She saw the rats.

They weren't actually rats. She realised that straight off. But rats were what they made her think of, and rats was the word that registered in her brain.

They had too many legs to be rats. Too many legs, and not nearly enough eyes or hair. Plus, they were the size of terriers, which was quite unusual for rats.

But by golly there were a lot of them.

Chapter

10

Underneath the Mountain

They were going to eat her.

There was no doubt in Amy's mind about that. They were scurrying towards her along the hallway floor in a great tide of wrinkled, grey-pink bodies, with chattering teeth that looked like they were coated with metal and designed for biting through wire.

She wasn't exactly sure *why* she thought they were going to eat her. It wasn't as though they had a malicious look in their eyes, because they didn't have eyes. They just had sockets where eyes were supposed to be, sockets that looked like surgical excisions, sockets that had been emptied and then packed with brown material the texture of foam, like the covers to headphone buds or a voice mic. They had claws that resembled bird-foot articulations built from old compass and divider sets. They had tails that looked like the coating of black electrical cable stretched over bike chain.

'Oh my god, you're all completely horrible!' she exclaimed, and began to retreat very fast. They

responded by accelerating towards her, rushing in a sudden flood, the larger rats pushing smaller ones aside or trampling them. The nasty, wrinkly grey flesh on their bodies was taut enough to reveal the outlines of their ribcages.

'And you're hungry!' she yelped, finally understanding what had tipped her off. They were famished, and they were behaving the way any hungry creatures did when they detected food.

She started to sprint. They were after her. Their jaws snapped wide, ready to bite, revealing dentition that would have looked much more at home on posters for a film about memorable summers on Amity Island.

One of the rat-things leapt at her. It missed, but it nearly took a chunk out of her left calf with a snap of its teeth. Another leapt. She swatted it away with her hand. A third sprang at her and she struck at it but failed to connect, and it seized her mitten in its mouth, attaching itself to her through-sleeve elastic like a fish to a line.

'Get off!' she yelled, and swung the thing hard so that it bashed into the hallway wall. It took two fairly deliberate smacks to make it let go of the mitten and fall onto the floor.

By then, the main portion of the rat flood had reached her. She screamed in horror. What was about to happen was going to be unpleasant. About as unpleasant as unpleasant ever got.

What actually happened next *was* unpleasant, but not in the way she had been expecting. There was a shrill noise, like some kind of alarm or whistle. It stabbed into her ears like knitting needles and made her cry out in pain and stumble to her knees. It was an awful sound. It was the sort of sound that felt like it would break your ears, microwave your brain, and make smoke come out of your nose.

It actually did that to several of the rats. Some dropped dead in their tracks. Others fell, twitching and writhing in pain. The rest simply recoiled and fled. Their frantic metal claws made skritchy, squealy, teeth-on-edge noises as they fled down the metal hallway, noises that Amy would not have enjoyed at all if she'd been able to hear them. Her ears, however, were still ringing from the monstrously shrill sound.

Shaking her head, she got up. The Doctor was standing right behind her, with Arabel and Samewell, both looking scared, behind him. The Doctor was smiling.

'____ ,' he said.'____.'

'What?' Amy asked.

'____,' the Doctor replied, still smiling, but looking concerned.

'Give me a clue,' she said. 'Is it a book? How many words? Why aren't you talking to me?'

The Doctor turned and said something equally inaudible to Arabel and Samewell.

'It's my ears, isn't it?' asked Amy. 'That sound knackered my ears, didn't it?'

The Doctor turned back to her. He pointed to his sonic screwdriver, and made a sad face. '____,' he said.

She could read his lips. She knew what *sorry* looked like.

Sol Farrow was a strong man, noted for his labour in the fields and heathouses. Sol was not quite as big as Jack Duggat, for Jack Duggat was the biggest of all Morphans in Beside, but he was an ox of a man nevertheless. Elect Groan have given him the task of nightwatching Beside's westgate, and offered him his choice of arms to take. Sol had chosen a fine, longhandled shovel with a shipskin tongue. He'd also taken a good sickle from the tool store, and hooked it

into his belt under his heavy winter coat. Sol did not intend to be found wanting. He'd heard the stories over the past weeks, all of them: the tall figures glimpsed in the woods, the killed cattle and sheep, the stars that did not stay still. What were those things in the woods? Were they real, real giants of the forest, regarding the plantnation with evil intent? Or were they just figments of the imagination, sprites conjured by the fearful mindset of the Morphans?

Sol Farrow was a sound man, and would have normally supposed the latter. People jumped at shadows, and at sounds in the night. They saw things sometimes that weren't really there. The hard winters and the snow, well, that was a misfortune, a hardship they had to bear, but it was making people agitated, and in that agitation, their minds raced and imagined. Now he was not so sure. There was too much that couldn't be accounted for, more than could be explained by imagination and a rogue dog.

How many men had not returned from the search today? There was no trace of them. If they'd been taken by something, like the livestock had been taken, then the population of Beside had suffered a mortal blow. Nightwatching had not been done in his time, or his

father's, or his father's father's. According to the practices listed in the word of Guide, nightwatching had been done in the early times, when the Morphans first came to Hereafter. Nightwatch had been posted around the first camps, while the towns were being raised and constructed. Back then, the Morphans had not known much about the world Hereafter, and had no idea what hid in the dark when it fell.

Bill Groan had reinstated the practice of nightwatch after the third livestock killing. He posted watchmen at the compass gates of Beside, plus another at the heathouses, another at the well, and two to patrol from the byre to the dairy. Another watchman would beat the bounds of the plantnation through the night. Bill Groan had been determined that no mad dog would get into the town and threaten the children or the old.

A precaution. That's all it had seemed at first. And a burden, because men like Sol had to stand out all hours in the cold weather.

After the day they'd just had, it seemed like a necessity.

It was bitter cold, and light snow was falling. Sol could hear the hiss and whisper of it. From his vantage, with the town at his back, he had the edge of the woods

and the open land of fairground ahead of him. To his left, he could see the slight glow of the solamps in the heathouses. To his right, like a dark and cloudy phantom behind the snow, he could just make out the bulk of Firmer Number One.

The cold was getting to him. He had a small brazier for warmth, crackling near his feet, a flask of broth, and he made sure he did not stand still for too long. Pacing kept his feet warm. He left the end of his shovel resting on the ground, supporting it with one hand, and kept the other hand tucked inside his coat for warmth. Every few minutes, he would change hands and stuff the other away.

Sol put both hands on the shovel and raised it. He had heard something. He was sure he'd heard something. Across fairground, out near the woods. It sounded as though something had moved. He waited, listening, peering into the darkness, seeing nothing. It was probably just snow-gather building up on a branch, finally snapping it under its accumulated weight or sloughing off. Since the snows had come, that sort of odd sound, noises of slumping and fluttering as fallen snow redistributed itself, had become very common.

Sol glanced back towards Beside. Lamps were burning throughout the heart of the settlement. It looked reassuring, almost cosy. He longed to be down there, at a fireside, talking with friends and eating a good supper. That community and companionship was what life was about. The hard toil and struggle of the Morphan existence was made bearable by the simple reassurances of hot food and a hearth, and a circle of friends.

Sadly, Sol reflected, that was not why the lamps were lit in Beside tonight. The council and the community were meeting in the assembly.

Crisis talks, Cat A.

Bill Groan stood in the porch of the assembly hall under the light of a solamp, listening as Old Winnowner read out the list.

Eight names. Eight good Morphan men of Beside who had not returned at day's end. Eight fathers, eight strong labourers, part of the backbone of the community. How could eight men go missing in the snow during the daytime? A fall or other mishap might take one, two if things were really unlucky. But eight? They were all his friends.

Winnowner read the other names on the list.

Harvesta Flurrish, of course, the poor girl whose disappearance had started the search in the first place. Winnowner had reminded Bill that it was the anniversary of Tyler Flurrish's death. Perhaps Vesta had been marking that loss. Perhaps that was why she had not come for labour at the chime of Guide's Bell. It seemed a particularly cruel twist of Guide's will for her to disappear on the anniversary of her father's passing. What horrible fate had befallen her, Bill wondered. Had the dog got her? Had it cornered her and brought her down like a lamb? Or, Guide help them all, was there some truth in these stories of giants in the woods?

Arabel Flurrish was missing too. No one had seen her or Samewell Crook since the morning meeting. Bill Groan knew Arabel Flurrish well. She was one of the brightest and best, strong-willed and quickwitted. Bill had no doubt Bel would rise to a high Morphan office like Nurse Elect in her time. Vesta was sweet and kind, but Bel was strong and driven. Bill was certain Bel had gone out to look for her sister anyway, permission or no permission. It was typical of her headstrong behaviour. Samewell Crook, well he was driven by his hopeless heart and good nature. He was so struck on

Arabel, if she'd told him to jump in the mill race with his boots on, he'd have done it. He'd gone with her, to help her, that was obvious too.

But they hadn't come back. By nightchime, they had not returned. Worse still, just after noon, Jack Duggat had discovered that the two strangers had vanished from the compter too. Jack had gone down to take them some food and water, and found the cage open. Had they let themselves out? If so, how? The lock on the cage was a good, strong one, and it had not been forced.

Bill suspected that Bel, perhaps in some delusion, had let them out. He would not put such unilateral action past her, especially when she was so lacking in patience and concerned for her sister. She'd been eager to question the strangers, after all. Perhaps they had promised to show her where her sister had gone in return for release?

Even so, how had Bel opened the cage? A want of patience was a true vice, and certainly one of Arabel Flurrish's personal flaws, but even she, fired up and on a mission, could not manufacture a key out of nowhere.

Perhaps the matters weren't connected. Perhaps Bel

and Samewell had gone off, and the strangers had got out of their own accord.

All Bill Groan could plainly see was that in the middle of the hardest winter the Morphans had ever known, two strangers who seemed to come from no plantnation, which was the only place anyone could have come from, turned up on the self-same day eleven Morphans of Beside went missing.

'They're taking their seats, Elect,' said Chaunce Plowrite, stepping out of the assembly to speak to Bill.

Bill Groan nodded.

'We should go in,' said Winnowner. In the low solamp light, she looked older than ever. Age and effort, and the stress of the current times had shaved more years off her. Bill felt a tightness. Winnowner Cropper could be difficult and set in her ways, but he relied upon her. A doctrine of continuity had kept the Morphans alive for twenty-seven generations, and it was just as vital as the doctrine of patience. One generation learned from the last. Knowledge and skills were stockpiled and maintained. The young did not have to make the same mistakes their predecessors had done, because the result of mistakes were taught so they could be avoided. Time and effort were not

wasted by learning through experience. Morphans prospered by listening to their elders and learning. Hereafter was a hard place to live and a slow place to terrafirm. It did not offer second chances, but if you paid attention to the wisdom of your elders, it reduced the chances of you needing any.

Bill could not bear to think of Winnowner going. He did not know what he would do without her. He could not imagine being Nurse Elect and not having her years and counsel to call upon. If this crisis of ice and mysteries had hastened the end of Winnowner Cropper's life, then he...

He tried not to think about it. The plantnation records and oral histories both attested to the fact that it was always a sorry time when the last of a generation passed. It always marked the end of an era, and reminded the Morphan community of the vulnerability and the sheer duration of the lifecycle they had been born into. Bill knew that Winnowner's death would be a watershed in his service as Elect, and his life too. He prayed to Guide that it wouldn't happen when they were in the midst of such an unprecedented Cat A calamity.

'We should go in,' she repeated.

'And tell them what?' Bill asked.

'Speak fairly to them,' she replied. 'There's nothing we can do tonight except keep warm and keep watch.'

'And tomorrow?'

She shrugged. 'We search again.'

Bill sighed. 'What if they are true?' he asked.

'If what are true, Elect?'

'The stories of giants.'

'There is nothing in all of Guide's words about giants,' she said.

'There was nothing about strangers either,' he said, 'but today strangers came.'

'They were unguidely, and they brought conjury with them,' she replied.

'I understand that,' he said. 'I do. But just because something is unguidely, just because it is not part of Guide's law, it doesn't mean we can ignore it. It could be killing us, Winnowner. Do we let it?'

'Of course not,' she said. 'Survival is the greatest doctrine of all. What is happening to us may be exceptional, and therefore not covered in specifics in Guide's words, but Guide will not fail us. We must look again. Study the passages. Guide will instruct us in ways we have not yet imagined.'

Bill Groan nodded. 'I think so too. We should start again tonight. All night, if it takes it.'

'Agreed,' said Winnowner. 'We will go in and you will say some words of consolation and comfort. Then I will open the Incrypt, and we will withdraw with the council for study.'

Chaunce Plowrite held the door for them and they entered the assembly. It was crowded. Almost every Morphan had come out, except those on nightwatch or with evening labours to perform.

Or those already lost, Bill Groan thought.

There was a hum of chatter in the room, but it died away as they came in and joined the other members of the council to take their seats. Small and very obvious knots of agitation surrounded the families of the missing men.

'What will you do, Elect?' Ela Seed asked, standing up almost at once. Her voice was clear and loud, but strained with worry. Her husband, Dom Seed, was one of the men who had not been seen since Guide's Bell had chimed middle-morning.

'I will ask Guide for direction, Ela,' said Bill Groan.

'Is that not what we have been doing for weeks now?' asked Lane Cutter. Several of the Morphans

around her uttered a rumble of support.

'It is,' said Bill.

'And what good has it done?' Lane asked, her face severe.

'Such talk is verging on the unguidely, Lane,' said Chaunce Plowrite. 'I know you are most concerned at Hud's absence, but—'

'Unguidely, am I now?' asked Lane with a brittle laugh. 'I think Guide has deserted us.'

There was a flurry of talk, some of it dismayed.

'I agree,' said Ela Seed. 'I know we must trust in Guide, and I know patience is our greatest virtue, and I know that those who are patient will provide for all of the plantnation, but we cannot just wait by for this to overcome us. My husband...'

Her voice broke. Her sister rose to steady her.

'We will consult Guide's words tonight,' said Bill. 'Winnowner is going directly to open the Incrypt. We will not rest until we have searched every passage and every section for truth and pertinence.'

'It is either that,' Jack Duggat scoffed, 'or we wait for a miracle!'

Laughter, little of it warm, rolled around the assembly.

'I think a miracle is what we might have found,' said Sol Farrow, speaking from the back of the hall.

Everyone turned. He had just come in, bringing snow with him.

'A small one, at any rate,' he said, 'but it gives us hope.'

He turned and beckoned. Two people came in out of the night.

'Oh good Guide,' murmured Bill Groan. 'Vesta Flurrish?'

'I found her coming in from the edge of the woods, Elect,' said Sol.

'I am unhurt, Elect,' Vesta said. Her cold cheeks had flushed in the heat of the assembly room. She indicated the man next to her. 'This is Rory,' she said.

'Um, hello,' said Rory.

The Doctor picked up one of the dead rats by the tail and peered at it. It was heavy, and it swung slightly in his grip. 'Nasty,' he remarked. 'And purpose built.'

'What?' asked Amy. Her hearing was returning, but the world was still sounding muffled. 'Did you say purpose built?'

'Manufactured,' the Doctor said. He reached in and peeled back the dead rat's lips to reveal its metal teeth.

'It's a rat,' he said. 'Definitely a rat. Genetically, a rat. From Earth. But it's been modified. Customised. Enhanced. And on an industrial scale, given the numbers of them.'

'It hasn't got eyes,' said Amy.

'No, because the designers didn't think it needed them. These are sophisticated motion sensors.' He pointed to the foam-like filler that packed the area where an ordinary rat would have had eyes.

'Motion?'

'In space, particularly interstellar space, it's cold and often very, very dark. So motion is a much more sensible format to base your sensory function on. There are some fairly advanced acoustic sensors there too.'

'Wait,' said Amy, shaking her head and frowning. She knew it wasn't possible and she knew it wouldn't do any good, but she really wanted a cotton bud. Her ears felt like they were gummed up with glue. 'Start again. We're not in space.'

'No,' agreed the Doctor, lifting his arm so he could study the suspended rat from below. 'We're in the terraformer. That's one of the very big machines that the original Morphans constructed to change Hereafter

from Earth *-esque* to properly Earth *-like!*

'You mean the Firmers?' asked Arabel. 'The Terra Firmers?'

'The three mountains that aren't mountains?' asked Amy.

The Doctor smiled and nodded. 'Yes,' he said. 'I think we're in Firmer Number Two, if I've been listening to Arabel correctly and my sense of direction is unerring.' He looked at Amy. 'And it is,' he grinned.

'We're underneath the mountain?' asked Samewell.

'This is what a Firmer looks like inside. Well, part of it.'

'And that factory noise?' asked Amy.

'The vast engines of the Firmer at work,' said the Doctor. 'Atmospheric processors, geo-seismic actuators, meteorological generators, seeding pumps. It's a world factory. It's changing the world. And it's been doing it for twenty-seven generations. It's an extraordinary piece of large-scale engineering performing an even more extraordinary and even more mind-bogglingly large-scale piece of engineering.'

'So returning to my original question,' said Amy, pointing. '"Blind space rats? *Huh?*"'

'Transrats is a better term,' said the Doctor. 'Like

Transhumans. Re-engineering both genetically and biologically to be more rat than rat. A living tool, if you like.'

'I've met more than one of those,' said Amy.

'During the great Diaspora Era,' said the Doctor, 'when mankind was spreading out from Earth, they were quite common on bulk generation starships or hibernation arks. Those vessels are huge, like small countries in space. And they travelled for many lifetimes to reach their destinations. The human passengers would spend thousands of years in suspended animation, ready to wake when they arrived at their final colonial destination, or else they would live out lives during the travel time. Whole civilisations could rise and fall on a generation starship in the time it took to reach another star.'

'Seriously?' asked Amy.

The Doctor nodded. 'And eco-systems would develop in the ship interiors in the meantime. Pests, lice, dirt, rodents. Mankind quickly learned that the best way to keep a generation starship clean was to keep them purged. Rats eat anything. So mankind engineered rats that could survive in almost any conditions and could eat anything. Transrats lived in

the dark corners of the ships, basically eating anything that wasn't supposed to be there.'

'So... these came here on the Morphans' original ship?' asked Amy.

'Well, yes and no,' said the Doctor. 'The idea of them did, the technology. But they wouldn't have lasted for twenty-seven generations. They're not immortal, and they don't breed. These were manufactured recently.'

'Meaning?'

The Doctor exhaled thoughtfully. 'Meaning there's an automated manufacturing plant for this kind of thing here somewhere, and also a genetic stockpile containing rat DNA that it could access in order to breed new rats for conversion.'

'A rat factory?' asked Amy. 'Making easy-to-build rats?'

'Flat-pack rats,' the Doctor agreed. He swung the rat he was holding around by the tail like it was a bolas. 'Easy to build. Disposable.'

'But why?' asked Amy.

'Presumably because there's something wrong,' said the Doctor. He stopped spinning the rat, realising it was pretty undignified for both of them.

'The terraformer system has detected a loss of

efficiency or some other defect,' he said, 'and it's automatically starting diagnostic procedures to address it. Transrats would be a first step. Build some, release them into the systems, clean out any dirt, or clutter, or infestation, or glitches.'

'Glitches, huh?' said Amy. She looked at the ratthing the Doctor was holding. 'They seemed really hungry.'

'Because they're not the solution to the problem afflicting the terraformers,' said the Doctor. 'It's not a problem you can eat.'

'But if they got out,' said Bel. 'They'd attack sheep... goats...'

'They might,' the Doctor agreed. 'Hungry, and outside the system control of the terraformer, they could go on a frenzy. That would explain the livestock kills.'

'So the Ice Men haven't been killing and devouring sheep, then?' asked Amy. ' *Warriors.* I meant Warriors.'

'No,' said the Doctor, 'which sorts out one of my original problems. I suspected Ice Warriors from the start. The moment I realised that something was trying to manipulate an entire planet's climate and make it colder, I immediately thought of Ice Warriors.'

'Well, who wouldn't?' asked Amy.

'Quite,' said the Doctor.

'That was your hunch? The hunch you said you'd got?'

'Yes,' replied the Doctor. 'It fitted the modus operandi of the Ice Warriors, except for one small detail. They're herbivorous.'

'So they wouldn't be eating livestock,' said Amy, 'but these rats would.'

The Doctor swung the dead rat by the tail like a conker on a string. 'Yes, if they got out. But the terraforming system should be sealed enough to prevent them escaping into the wild.'

'You reckon the Ice Warriors broke into the terrafirmer and did something to sabotage it,' said Amy, 'and you also reckon the terrafirmer detected that sabotage as a problem and built the transrats to deal with it. Makes sense that the transrats would have got out through whatever hole the Ice Warriors made to get in. That's how they got out and started eating sheep.'

'Nice deduction, Pond,' said the Doctor.

'Why would these Ice Warrior things attack the Firmers, though?' asked Arabel.

'Because they want an Earth-like planet too, but their idea of Earth-like is colder not warmer,' replied

the Doctor.

Arabel shook her head. 'I don't...' she began.

'Your ancestors,' said the Doctor, 'the original Morphans, were looking for a planet like Earth.'

'Like Earth before?' asked Samewell.

'Yes, like Earth before. But the chances of them finding a world that was exactly like Earth before were slim. I mean, the variables are huge. The best chance they had was to find a planet that was sufficiently like Earth—'

'Earth-esque,' said Amy.

'Precisely right,' said the Doctor. 'If they could find a planet that was sufficiently Earth-esque, then they could use the sophisticated terramorphing systems they had on their colony ark ship to tweak the climate and make it perfect. That's what you've been doing for twenty-seven generations. You've been watching over things while the terrafirmers tweak and finetune Hereafter to make it just right.'

'And these charming Ice Warrior blokes,' said Amy, 'have a very different concept of just right.'

'They need an Earth-like planet too,' said the Doctor, 'but their idea of Earth-like is not like your idea of Earth-like, it's like—'

'Way too many likes there, Doctor,' said Amy.

'OK, in broad terms you're both looking for the same sort of world, but their ideal environmental baseline is between fifty and seventy-five degrees cooler than humanity's.'

'So they're fighting against us?' asked Arabel.

'I've known them sabotage biomes before,' said the Doctor grimly. 'I've seen them doing their own terraforming. I even saw them try it on Earth once. On Earth before, before Earth before was lost. I've never seen them hijack someone else's terraforming system and recalibrate it. Typical Ice Warrior pragmatism.'

'How did you stop the rats?' Samewell asked. He copied the Doctor and picked up one of the dead rats by the tail.

The Doctor put down the rat he was dangling. He fished his sonic screwdriver out of his jacket pocket. 'I noticed the enhanced acoustic sensors,' he said. 'I guessed they'd be particularly sensitive to sonic attack. I hoped a little high-frequency burst would be enough to zap them or drive them off.'

'And deafen me,' said Amy.

'I trusted your ears wouldn't be quite as sensitive as theirs,' said the Doctor.

'Well, I'll take earache over being eaten alive by rats any day,' Amy started to say.

Samewell let out a screech of alarm. The transrat he'd picked up wasn't dead. It suddenly shivered, twitched, and woke from the fugue state the Doctor had blasted it into. Its huge jaws opened like a spring trap. Massive steel-veneered teeth gleamed in the half-light. Swinging itself by its tail, the rat started to snap and gnash at Samewell.

'Put it down!' Bel yelled.

'Don't put it down! Keep it at arm's length!' Amy shouted.

'Aaaaaaaaaahhhh!' Samewell observed.

The Doctor clicked open his screwdriver and calmly aimed it at the aggressive creature. Nothing happened.

'Ooops,' he said.

'Doctor!'

He fiddled with the screwdriver.

'I've asked too much of it today already,' he said, 'what with noise-cancelling the Ice Warriors and zapping the transrats, it's really drained. It's gone into sleep mode.'

'Doctor!'

Amy lunged and grabbed the rat's tail out of

Samewell's grip. He was still yelping in alarm. The transrat snapped at her repeatedly, trying to chomp her arm or her face.

'Yeah, yeah,' Amy snarled and swung it by the tail hard into the tunnel wall. It went limp and she dropped it. 'Worked last time,' she said.

'Who is this Rory?' asked Bill Groan.

'He's my friend, Elect,' replied Vesta. 'We met in the woods. We were both threatened. He looked out for me.'

'I see,' said Bill Groan.

'I may have hit him on the head with a mallet too,' Vesta admitted.

'But that's totally not important,' said Rory.

'He's a stranger,' said Chaunce Plowrite.

'Yes,' said Vesta.

'Another stranger,' said Old Winnowner. 'That's three today.'

A hush had fallen on the assembly. Everyone was staring at Vesta and Rory. Rory felt pretty uncomfortable. In the solamp light, the faces around him were stern and unforgiving. They seemed to be searching for answers, as though they might peel back or melt away his skin to find the secrets they were

looking for. There was pent-up emotion in the hall. These were people who had lived hard lives and, no matter how hard they worked, they did not expect those lives to change. Something profound mattered to them, something that threatened what little comfort and solace they had in their lives, and they wanted answers.

Despite sensing that, Rory could not help asking the question.

These other strangers, the other two? Were they... a girl with long red hair and a tall bloke?'

Everyone around him started muttering and chattering.

'He admits to knowing them,' said Old Winnowner.

'Are they here?' asked Rory.

'They were here,' said Bill Groan. 'They escaped.'

'How could they escape?' asked Rory. 'What did they escape from? Why did they need to escape?'

'They were found to be unguidely and discovered in the practice of conjury,' said Old Winnowner. 'We placed them in the compter.'

'You locked them up?' asked Rory. 'You locked the Doctor and Amy up? That's a really bad idea.'

'They are his friends!' Vesta broke in. 'He was

travelling with them. Travelling here to well-wish us at the time of festival!'

'They were miscreants sent to—' Winnowner began.

'Travelling from where?' asked Bill Groan, cutting her short.

'Rory and his friends come from a plantnation that we have not heard of,' said Vesta.

'That's not possible!' said Bill Groan.

'It's unguidely!' cried Winnowner.

'It's the truth!' replied Vesta. The voices around the hall had become quite a hubbub. 'What is your plantnation called again, Rory?'

'Leadworth. It's called Leadworth.'

'This is nonsense and it is against Guide's way!' said Chaunce Plowrite.

'Look, I don't mean to cause trouble,' said Rory, trying to impose some calm. 'Where I come from doesn't really matter. What does matter is that there's something out there. Something in the woods. And it's dangerous. You've got to prepare to defend yourselves.'

'What thing?' asked Jack Duggat.

'I got separated from my friends, and it attacked me,' said Rory.

'It has red eyes!' announced Vesta.

'It has red eyes,' Rory agreed. 'It attacked Vesta too. It's very dangerous. I ran away from it. I had to escape. That's when I met Vesta.'

'Why should we believe you?' asked Chaunce Plowrite. Several members of the congregation echoed him.

'Because it's dangerous!' said Rory. 'I saw it attack some men. I think they were from here. It attacked them. It hurt them.'

'What were their names?' asked Winnowner.

'I don't know! We hadn't been introduced.'

'What did they look like?' Ela Seed demanded.

'I... I... They looked like they came from here.'

'Was one of them my husband?' asked Lane Cutter.

'I don't know!'

'It hurt them, you say?' asked Bill Groan.

'Did it kill them?' asked Ela Seed frantically. 'Are they dead?'

The clamour was becoming quite intense. Morphans closed on Rory from all sides. They were angry and upset, reaching out to him.

'Get back there!' Sol Farrow told them. 'Mind him! Get away!'

'Leave him be!' Vesta yelled.

'Calm yourselves! Calm yourselves!' Bill Groan shouted over the din, pushing his way through the milling crowd. 'This is unseemly! Be calm now or I will have the assembly cleared! This will not do! Leave him be!'

The crowd would not be hushed. It was turning very ugly. People were pushing and shoving to get at Rory.

'You should not treat him so!' Vesta yelled at them. 'He is our guest, and a friend! You should not treat a Nurse Elect in this manner!'

Bill Groan heard her over the row. 'He's what?' Bill looked at Sol and Jack.

The two men nodded and grabbed Rory and Vesta. They began to bundle them through the angry, mobbing crowd, heading for the rear of the assembly hall. People started to protest. They threw punches and grabbed.

Old Winnowner was waiting at the back for them. She had taken out the key, which she wore on a ribbon around her neck, and used it to open the padlock to the back doors of the hall. Jack and Sol brought Rory and Vesta through, followed by Winnowner and Bill Groan. Bill and the old woman bolted the doors behind them

to keep the mob back. Morphans started shouting and banging at the doors.

Rory look around. They'd come through into a large wooden antechamber behind the main hall. There were clerestory lights high up by the roof, and rush matting on the wooden floor. On the far side of the room was an ornate door made of what the Morphans called shipskin. It was set in a complex frame, and reminded Rory of some kind of futuristic airlock or submarine hatch.

'We can be calm here for a moment,' said Bill Groan.

'Where is here?' asked Rory, shaking off Sol's grip.

'It's the outer room of Guide's place,' said Old Winnowner.

'What's that?' asked Rory, pointing at the metal hatch.

'That's the door to the Incrypt,' said Vesta. That's where Guide's words live. Only the council go in there.'

'Stop asking questions and answer some,' said Bill to Rory. 'She said you are a Nurse. Is that true? You are a Nurse Elect?'

'Yes, I... yes. Yes, I am' said Rory.

'Then I greet you, one Nurse Elect to another,' said Bill Groan with touching formality.

'It is a lie or a trick,' said Winnowner. 'Those others, whom he admits to knowing, said they were from Seeside, and they bore conjury to convince us so - '

'Maybe there are things we don't know about!' snapped Vesta.

The Morphans looked at her.

'I'm saying, maybe there are,' she said. 'Don't look at me so. I don't hardly know what Rory is, except that he is nice and kind, and I don't know about his friends either, but I do know there is something in the woods outside the plantnation that is most angry and dangerous, and I know it is not mentioned anywhere in Guide's teaching. So what do we do about it? Do we just pretend it does not exist because Guide has no! spoken of it?'

'Guide gives us rules to live by for our own good, Vesta,' Winnowner said.

'The thing in the woods proves one matter, Winnowner,' Vesta told the old woman. 'It proves there are things in this world Hereafter that are more than are in Guide's words. The thing is one, Rory may be one too, also his friends and whatever plantnation they

come from. I ask you, do we stand there accusing them of being unguidely, or do we do something about them?'

'We could prove it,' said Bill Groan quietly.

'What now?' asked Winnowner.

'You know that, Winnowner,' he said. 'We have both been taught it. We know Guide's doctrines, and the schema of words that instructs the Morphans. Our Guide Emanual will recognise and identify those things that belong to Guide. Only the true unguidely will remain strangers and unknown. If... Rory here is truly a Nurse Elect, then Guide will know him. Guide knows his own.'

'What are you suggesting, Elect?' asked Winnowner.

'You know what I'm suggesting,' said Bill.

Winnowner shook her head. 'Elect, this is the threshold of the Incrypt, our most precious place. Only the most worthy and maintained of Morphan kind can pass this way and be received of Guide's words.'

'My point exactly,' said Bill Groan. 'Let Rory prove himself.'

The knocking at the doors and the clamour of voices was not abating. Winnowner looked Rory up and down.

'This isn't going to be some kind of... trial by combat, is it?' Rory asked warily. 'Or, by sharks or spiders or something? If there's a pit or a cage involved, or a choice of weapons, I'm really not up for it. Especially if there's baying and jeering going on too.'

'Nothing like that,' said Bill Groan. He walked over to the metal hatch. 'Come over here, Rory,' he said, beckoning.

Rory walked up to him in a slightly unwilling manner.

Bill Groan pointed. There was a flat panel of matt silver metal set into the hatch frame on the right-hand side. It was about the size of a hardback book and it was built in at door-handle height.

'That's the chequer,' he said. 'It knows the touch of those that are worthy and, through it, Guide knows us.'

Bill placed his palm flat on the panel. A neon glow travelled up the metal under his hand. There was a click, and then a hiss, and then the hatch opened. Clean, cool air breathed out at them. Through the open hatch, Rory could see some sort of chamber bathed in a bluish neon illumination.

'The Incrypt opens to my hand,' said Bill. He

touched the panel again. The hatch closed as gently as it had opened.

'It's a palm reader,' said Rory. 'It's biometric. It's reading your handprint, or maybe your genetic pattern.'

'You try,' said Bill.

'Oh, I don't think that's such a good idea,' said Rory.

'If you're a Nurse Elect, Guide will recognise you and let you in,' said Winnowner.

'Really, I—' Rory said.

'Try,' ordered Bill Groan.

Rory placed his hand flat on the panel.

Chapter

11

The Maker of Our Earth

With the Doctor enthusiastically leading the way, they explored the deep chambers and tunnels of the massive terraformer plant.

The simple scale of it silenced Bel and Samewell, and took Amy back a bit too. The machined and engineered cavities inside the artificial mountain were bigger than any machine, factory or structure she'd ever seen on Earth. They also matched or exceeded the scale of structures she'd seen since leaving Earth and travelling aboard the TARDIS.

They followed winding tunnels lined in galvanised metal plates or slightly tarnished sheets of shipskin. They entered chambers that had been hollowed out of the hill so that the face of the rock was cut perfectly smooth and straight-edged, like set and polished concrete. Colossal machines that Amy thought of as turbines dominated these chambers, feeding whatever energies or processes they output into vast networks of gleaming metal pipes and condensers. Some of these pipes, large enough in cross-section to take two trains

on parallel lines, exited into vent stacks, or swept down into stone floors, connected to other, deeper chambers and larger, stranger machines.

Sometimes, the Doctor and his companions came out of tunnels onto mesh walkways of welded shipskin that crossed, precipitously, the middle of vast subterranean spaces, delicate bridges suspended hundreds of metres above the chamber floors from which they could look up at dim ceilings thousands of metres above, or peer down into heat-exchange trenches or energy sinks or other abyssal clefts that pulsed with distant glimmers of energy, and dropped away into the planet's crust for miles. Warm updrafts touched their faces and billowed their hair.

'I've run out of words for big,' said Amy.

'None of them seem adequate, do they?' the Doctor agreed.

Everywhere they went, they could hear the whirr and hum of the giant mechanisms. Occasionally, they could also hear the scratch and scurry of transrats emanating from blind tunnels or side vents.

They entered one chamber on the level of the rock floor and found it to be the largest they had seen yet. Its dizzying space was dominated by a massive column

of silvery metal that was fed by a cobweb of tubes and ducts. It looked like a huge chrome oak tree. High up, the roof of the titanic chamber was hazed by clouds of vapour, so that the branches of the giant metal tree appeared to be swathed in ghostly foliage.

'Are those clouds?' Amy asked, looking up.

The Doctor nodded.

It was drizzling slightly, like a wet autumnal day. The chamber was so big, it had its own weather system.

'That's a secondary sequence prebiotic crucible,' said the Doctor, with the appreciative tone of a twitcher who has just spotted a very rare species. 'What a beauty.'

'What does it do?' asked Bel.

'It makes the world a better place,' said the Doctor. 'In human terms, anyway. It makes life. It's gently sculpting and shaping the ecosystem of Hereafter.'

'You said secondary,' said Amy.

'What?'

'You said it was a secondary sequence something or other.'

'Yes,' said the Doctor, matter-of-factly. 'There'll be about a hundred of these, all supporting the main

sequence crucibles. I hope we get a look at one of those, because they're really big.'

Amy grinned at him. 'I don't often get to see you actually impressed,' she said.

'How could you fail to be?' he replied. 'This is human engineering at pretty much its peak. This is the point at which those little apes from Earth actually advanced so far they could rebuild and redesign whole planets. That's the mark of a great species. To be fair, it's a slow old process. It takes hundreds of years, and the people who start the process don't live anything like long enough to see the end, but still. But still, they do it. That's what I love about people. They have dreams and grand ambitions, and they start building towards them, even though they know they won't live to see them finished. That's how the pyramids were built. And the great cathedrals of the middle ages. People were prepared to invest in the future. They were prepared to donate the labour of their entire lives to a greater whole that other lives, future lives, would benefit from.'

Amy glanced across at Samewell and Arabel, who were standing in reserved awe, gazing up at the vast machine, rain speckling their faces.

'What happens if it takes so long they start to forget what it's all for?' she asked.

'The Morphans haven't forgotten, Pond,' said the Doctor. 'They know what they're doing with their Terra Formers. They're committed to the process. They're sticking to the great plan.'

'Yeah, but even so,' said Amy. 'It's taken so long, they've started to misremember. It's taken so long... What did Bel say? Twenty-seven generations? They don't even understand the technology any more. It's all automatic. They're like the transrats living in the shadow of a machine that works all by itself. Sure, they know their routines and their jobs, and I'm sure they understand what they're part of, it's just...'

'What?'

'What happens when it ends?' she asked. 'I mean, when the job's done? Will they be ready for that?'

'It won't happen for several more generations,' said the Doctor.

'That's my point. Will the great-great-greatgrandchildren of these Morphans know any better? Will they be ready? Isn't there a danger they won't know what to do with the world they've built, because all they've ever learned to do is survive during

the process of building?'

'I'm sure they'll take to it,' said the Doctor.

'What did the stonemasons of Europe do when there were no cathedrals left to build?' she asked. 'What did the slaves do when the pyramids were finished? How did they feel?'

The Doctor thought about it and frowned.

'These Morphans are really good people, what I've seen of them,' said Amy. 'They're hardworking and selfless and totally serious about their lives. But it really feels to me like they only understand this, the work in progress. I don't know what they'll do when the job's finished.'

'Well,' replied the Doctor, 'that's what life and evolution is all about. The Morphans are adapting a world to fit their biology. When it's ready, when it's properly Earth-like, they'll have to adapt their minds and attitudes to make the most of living in it.'

He fell silent for a moment.

'What's the matter?' asked Amy.

'There's always the question of if they're actually going to get a chance to make a go of it anyway, of course,' said the Doctor. 'A problem that starts with Ice...'

'And ends with Warriors,' Amy said, and nodded.

'This sightseeing is all very interesting and rather uplifting,' the Doctor told her, 'but I need to work out exactly what the Ice Warriors are doing to the Firmer systems.'

'And stop them?'

'Yes,' he nodded. 'I actually have a lot of time and respect for the Martian culture, but in this instance, I'm on the Morphans' side. They have the claim here, and the Ice Warriors are essentially trying to wipe them out. We have to put things right for the Morphans.'

They started walking again, and crossed through another tunnel link into a chamber cavity that opened a giddying drop beneath their narrow shipskin walkway. Far below, magmatic forces rumbled and glowed.

'Not being funny, but how are we going to win this?' asked Amy quietly. 'The Ice Warriors are very big, very strong, and very hench. And they've got sound guns and spaceships and all kinds of freaky nastiness. On our side, we've got a bunch of farmers whose idea of a weapon is a garden rake. If it comes to a fight, it's going to be really one-sided.'

'Then we have to be clever and not let it come to a fight,' said the Doctor. 'We take on the Ice Warriors by

outsmarting them.'

'Are they stupid, then?'

'No, not at all,' said the Doctor. 'They're really very intelligent. But I'm me.'

'OK,' she said, 'hit me with your clever.'

'We find out how they're sabotaging things, and we sabotage their sabotage. That's how we beat them.'

'It's that easy?' asked Amy.

'No, that's going to be ridiculously hard,' the Doctor said with a sigh.

'I thought you were super-smart?'

'Have you seen the scale and size and complexity of this system? It's going to take me a while to identify exactly what the Ice Warriors are doing, and then I've got to work out how to repair or reverse it. And I have to do all of that without mucking up any of the other systems. This is a very finely balanced process. Plus, these terraformers are automated systems. A lot of the component units are sealed because there's supposed to be no need for manual repair. A lot of them are physically inaccessible. How would you get down there if that needed fixing, for instance?'

She peered over the rail and shuddered.

'Not to mention,' said the Doctor, mentioning it, 'that

I'm temporarily without a working sonic screwdriver, which makes everything a gazillion times harder.'

'It'll recharge,' Amy reassured him.

'I know,' he said, 'but we haven't got a lot of time. And my biggest concern is not to damage the terraforming systems. My normal approach, as you well know, is to fiddle and improvise, but if I attempt too much of that, I could end up doing more damage than the Ice Warriors. You know what I could really do with?'

'The Big Book of Terraforming For Beginners?' she asked.

'Yes, actually,' he replied. 'What I could really do with is the instruction manual that came with this planet cruncher.'

'It'll be in the glove box,' grinned Amy.

Bel came over to them, followed by Samewell. She was wrinkling her nose. 'What's that smell?' she asked.

The Doctor sniffed. 'Sulphur, from the mantle vents,' he said.

'No, there's something else,' said Amy.

The Doctor sniffed again. 'You're right, Pond,' he said. 'I impaired your hearing so your sense of smell has compensated. That's... decay. That's something

rotten.'

'Whatever, it's not very nice,' said Arabel.

The Doctor was already moving. They followed him along the walkway, through a rock-cut tunnel, and down a metal-lined corridor that opened out into a broad, domed room that looked like some kind of store. By the time they entered it, the smell of putrefaction had become very strong.

'Ugh,' said Amy, covering her nose and mouth. 'That's rank.'

'Decaying organic matter,' the Doctor mused. 'But why down here?'

The walls of the domed room were lined with rows of plastic-fronted cupboards, each one containing a bio-hazard suit and mask, made for a human.

'This was a prep area,' said the Doctor. 'Scientists or technicians came in here to suit up. See overhead?' He pointed at banks of blue lights built into the domed roof. 'UV decontamination lamps,' he mused. 'They came in here, suited up and sterilised themselves...'

He went back to the doorway they had entered through. It was a sliding hatch, but it had already been open when they arrived.

'Look,' he said. There was a panel of silver metal in

the frame to the right-hand side of the hatch. Something very hot had cut through it, fusing it. The edges of the metal cut looked like melted butter. They were blackened.

'That's a palm-scan checker,' said the Doctor. 'It operates the lock. Something cut through it from outside to get in here.'

'Something hot,' said Amy.

'I think focused sonics, actually,' the Doctor replied.

He crossed to the open hatchway on the other side of the domed prep-room. That was open too. Similar damage had been done to the palm-scanner. The smell of rot and decay was much stronger on that side of the room.

'Let's see, shall we?' the Doctor suggested. He went through the open hatchway. They followed him.

On the other side, they found themselves at one end of a gallery space.

The gallery was large and very long. Very, *very* long. At least a mile long. It was immense. It reminded Amy of an industrial nursery, a massive greenhouse, except that it was underground. Banks of bright, artificial sun lamps ran along the roof, and the galvanised metal floor was lined with rows of deep

metal tanks and glass vats. It seemed like something had been growing in here, a considerable crop of things.

The smell in the gallery was awful, like bins left out on a summer's day, six weeks into a garbage strike.

'What is this? Are they growing plants?' asked Amy.

'Certainly cultivation of some sort,' the Doctor agreed. 'I didn't expect this. Unless...'

He peered into one of the vats.

'Unless what?' asked Samewell.

'These cultivator units have broken down,' said the Doctor. 'There's been a malfunction and they've failed. Perhaps a deliberate malfunction. The reason they smell so bad is that it's not plant matter they're nurturing here. These were in-vitro nutrient banks for organic tissue.'

'Why?' asked Amy. She climbed up beside the Doctor and peered over into the vat. The stink that wafted up at her was frankly appalling. The vat was basically empty, but from a tide mark on the side, she could see where it had previously been full. The bottom of the tank was filled with a slimy, foul-smelling residue, like something gruesome and decomposing from a horror movie. 'Oh, that is properly

disgusting,' she announced.

'Yes, but why?' the Doctor pondered, tapping a finger to his lips. 'Why tissue? I suppose this could have been some kind of storage system for organic samples. Maybe the DNA used to build the transrats was kept in suspension in this sort of thing. This may have been a genetic stockpile, a library of animal DNA, so that the Morphans could grow all sorts of strains of creature once the world was ready.'

'Really?' asked Amy. 'So this was... this *muck*... this was living tissue? Like flesh and blood?'

The Doctor nodded. 'But the vital support system has failed or been sabotaged. Sabotaged is my guess, from the way the hatches were forced. Now it's beginning to rot,' he said. 'So the genetic database is corrupted.'

He looked at Amy.

'Or,' he said, drawing out the word.

'Or what?' she asked.

'Or this wasn't a genetic library at all,' he said. 'It was an organic farm.'

'How do you mean?'

'I mean,' said the Doctor, 'that someone or something was growing meat in these tanks.'

Amy pulled a revolted face.

'Like something out of Frankenstein's lab?' she asked.

'Yes,' said the Doctor, 'but an awful lot less nice.'

The hatch to the Incrypt waited for a moment, considering the scan of Rory's palm. Rory stood with his hand pressed to the plate and a sick, fixed grin on his face, frantically working out what he would say when the hatch didn't open.

He'd just come up with an absolutely killer approach that would absolutely, without question, persuade Bill Groan and the other Morphans he was on the level, despite the non-compliance of the hatch, but then the hatch opened and he never got a chance to use it.

'You see?' he said, hoping the billion tons of relief freighting his voice at that moment would not be obvious.

'Well,'said Bill Groan.

'Guide preserve us,' said Winnowner.

'We have done you a disservice, Elect Rory,' said Sol Farrow.

' That's entirely OK and fine,' said Rory shaking his head and swallowing hard. 'I understand that you have

to be careful, especially with all the... the things that are happening. Shall we?'

He moved towards the hatch.

'Well, there's no need to go in now, is there?' asked Winnowner. Jack Duggat half-blocked Rory's nonchalant advance.

'I mean,' said the old woman, 'the point was to see if you could open the door, and that point's been made. There's no need to go in.'

'Well, no, I suppose,' said Rory.

'We had resolved to consult our Guide Emanual,' Bill Groan said to Winnowner. The chequer has confirmed Elect Rory's worthiness. Why would we not include him in our study?'

Winnowner dropped her voice and spoke very directly and intently to Bill Groan.

'Our council,' she hissed. 'Our council, not anybody else's! This is a matter for Beside, and the council of Beside, and the word of our Guide Emanual as it is expressed to our council, not to anyone else! I'm sure Elect Rory and his council would not wish any of us to go prying into his Incrypt if we were visiting his plantnation.'

'What about a fresh eye, an alternative approach?'

Vesta suggested.

'No!' snapped Winnowner.

'It's not for you to say no,' said Bill Groan.

'Nor is it for you to say yes,' replied Winnowner.

'The council must vote on it. That is all there is to it.'

Bill Groan nodded. He glanced at Sol. 'Can we get back into the hall?'

The hammering had died away. It seemed quieter in the assembly. Things had calmed down. Or things were waiting to pounce the moment the doors opened.

'Jack and I will check,' Sol replied.

'Send everyone home except the council,' said Bill.

'Clear the assembly. We need to settle this and we need to get on. If this danger is as urgent as Vesta and Rory say...'

The two men unbolted the doors and went back into the hall. Rory heard a renewed round of raised voices. He glanced at Vesta, worried. She smiled back reassuringly.

After a couple of minutes, Sol reappeared at the doors and beckoned them through. The assembly room had been emptied apart from the remaining council members. One of Jack Duggat's labourers was closing

up the outer doors. Nothing had been overturned, but many of the chairs and benches in the congregation section had been pushed aside or left in disarray. The meeting had not ended happily.

'I had to bend the truth a little,' Rory heard Jack Duggat mutter to Bill Groan. 'I told them they had to return to their homes tonight because Guide needed the space. Deliberations had to be made. I told them it was Guide's express desire.'

'Guide will forgive you, Jack,' Bill replied.

'I said they'd have answers come Guide's Bell,' Jack added.

'Then well have to find them by then,' said Bill.

He gestured to Vesta, indicating she should take Rory to one side and be seated. There was drink and a little food set out on a sideboard. Rory hadn't realised just how hungry he was. He took some kind of soup, and some spelt bread, and watched as the council sat in discussion. Vesta ate too, with gusto, her eyes not leaving the debating council members.

'Oh,' she said suddenly, and sadly.

'What?' asked Rory. Before she could answer, he saw that Bill Groan was coming over.

'We've taken the vote,' Bill said. 'It's gone against

you. I'm sorry, Elect.'

'OK,' said Rory. 'What happens now?'

'The Council will withdraw to the Incrypt and start work,' said Bill. 'I suggest you two stay here for now. Stay close by so we can talk, if we need to. Help yourself to more food. Rest a while.'

Bill walked back to the council members, who stood and followed him through the doors into the Incrypt. Jack Duggat went with them, leaving Sol Farrow behind to keep an eye on them. Sol closed the back doors, and then shrugged at Vesta and Rory, acknowledging that he shared their helplessness. Then he ladled out a bowl of soup and went to sit by one of the firebuckets.

Rory sat while Vesta and Sol continued to eat. He listened to the crack and pop of the embers in the firebuckets. A soft but steady tapping on the panes of the assembly windows told him it was snowing hard again.

He realised that, despite the dangers and alarms of the day, waiting was perhaps the worst thing of all.

'Can we leave this place now?' Amy asked. 'Because it pongs.'

'Uh-huh,' the Doctor nodded. She could tell he

wasn't really listening. He was too deep in thought. She could almost see the cogs going around.

'Shall we go out the way we came in?' she asked, gesturing to the door that led back into the prep room.

'Mm-hmm,' he said. She still didn't have his attention properly. He was just making sounds in response to her sounds, encouraging, nonspecific sounds that created the illusion of an actual conversation without him having to engage in one.

That worried Amy. When the Doctor got sidetracked and lost in thought, it meant that there was a lot at stake. There was clearly a big problem on Hereafter, a proper, serious life-and/or-death problem. She'd worked that much out for herself. But the Doctor seemed to be troubled because, on top of the problem, there was a mystery as well.

She knew the Doctor quite liked problems. It didn't matter how big, or difficult, or scary, or intractable, or galaxy-crushing, or *tal-king-like-this-in-a-ras-ping-mon-otone-ro-bot-voice-and-u-sing-words-like-ex-ter-minate* a problem was, the Doctor relished them. He could confront them. He could take them on. He could solve them. He could usually say something quite pithy and off the cuff *while* solving them.

Mysteries, on the other hand, nagged. They festered and itched. They got him distracted and made him fidgety. A problem and a mystery at the same time was a body blow, because the Doctor could only get on with solving the problem once he'd explained the mystery.

The mystery here had various elements: the complexity and scale of the terraformer, the machinations of the surly and relentless Ice Warriors, and the seriously terrible weather. Amy thought that, if it was up to her, she might choose to add a complete and utter lack of Christmas to the list, but that seemed unfair. However, there were other elements. Something to do with this giant greenhouse stacked with tanks of rotting meat, for a start. She didn't really get the significance of that, but it seemed to trouble the Doctor greatly. It didn't seem to fit with the other things he was worried about. It was odd. It was inexplicable. Still, a bad smell was a bad smell, and a bad smell would have come as a welcome and fragrant breath of fresh air compared to the honk in the gallery. They'd been obliged to stand around in that place, surrounded by those reeking vats, for far too long as it was.

'Well go back out then?' she prompted.

'Mm-hmm.'

He wasn't even looking at her. He was pacing up and down, his finger to his lips.

'We'll come back out through that prep room with all the suits, then?' she asked. 'Find something else to look at?'

'Uh-huh.'

She turned to Bel and Samewell.

'Come on,' she said. 'If we start walking, he'll follow us.'

They started walking back along the row of vats towards the exit hatch. Sure enough, the Doctor followed them, though he was still so deeply submerged in thought it looked like he needed an idea snorkel.

They went out through the domed prep room with the Doctor tagging along behind.

'Maybe well find a nice spot for a picnic?' Amy called out over her shoulder.

'Mm-hmm,' the Doctor responded.

'He's not listening to us,' Amy said to Samewell and Bel. 'His mind's gone walkabout. He's going into thinky overdrive.'

'Does he get like this often?' asked Arabel.

'Yeah,' said Amy. 'Check this out.' Still walking, she called out over her shoulder, 'I see the walruses are very big this season.'

'Mmmmm.'

'They're flowering very early.'

'Mm-hmmm.'

'Nice to see them playing glockenspiels, though, eh?'

'Mmmmm.'

With her eyes and mouth open wide in mock dismay, Amy shook her head at Samewell and Bel, and made them both laugh.

Suddenly, the Doctor was right beside them. He was staring straight ahead. He was alarmingly alert. 'We've got to go back,' he said quietly.

'What?' Amy asked.

He forced them to stop walking by sticking his arm out in front of them, and craned his head, listening.

'What?' Amy repeated.

'We've definitely got to go back,' he said.

'Into the stinky room? Why?'

'Shhh!' he said. 'Can't you hear that?'

Amy couldn't hear anything.

'We've got to go back,' said the Doctor. 'Or at the

very least, we've got to *not* go this way.'

Then Amy heard it too. It was far away and coming from up ahead. It was the sound of footsteps. Heavy, regular, lumbering footsteps.

'Stay!' the Doctor whispered to them, as though his raised index finger would freeze them to the spot. He edged forward until he could peer down the corridor ahead.

The footsteps were getting closer. He saw movement first, then a shadow, cast on the corridor wall by a row of solamps.

There was no mistaking the silhouette.

He turned to them.

'Ice Warriors,' he said. 'Coming this way. Run.'

'Regular running or run for your life running?' asked Amy.

'What do you think?' the Doctor replied.

They ran.

They ran back through the prep room and into the organic gallery, ignoring the smell. The Doctor skidded to a halt in the doorway, checking the door panel to see if there was any way to close and lock the hatch behind them. Whatever had bored through the mechanism to open it had fused the hatch motors. The hatch was

wedged open.

'Keep going!' he yelled, running to catch up with them. They were running down the length of the vast gallery, following the grilled metal pathways between the stinking vats and the glass tanks clotted with slime.

'How do you know there'll be an exit at the far end?' Amy shouted at the Doctor.

'I don't!' he replied.

'Then what?'

'We don't have a lot of choice!' he replied.

Amy glanced back. Always a mistake, but she did it anyway.

She could see the entry hatch fifty metres behind her. The first of the Ice Warriors had appeared. There were three of them. They were so big, they had to come through the hatchway one at a time. There was something flat and expressionless about their faces. The overhead light banks reflected off their red lenses. They walked like hit-men, hired killers wearing expensive shades.

At least, she thought, the rows of vats and metal tanks would provide a little shelter and cover if the Ice Men started using their guns. Warriors. *Warriors.*

One last glimpse behind her showed her they

weren't packing guns at all.

They were carrying swords. Dirty great, double-handed, barb-hilted broadswords.

'Oh *great* she said.

Chapter

12

Brighter Visions Beam Afar

The Doctor heard Amy's strangled expression of alarm, and glanced back at their pursuers as well. He saw what she had just seen. The brutal, medieval weapons that the Ice Warriors were carrying with such brutal, medieval intent put an extra spurt of vigour into his pace. He began to lead the way, urging Samewell and Bel after him.

'Swords?' screeched Amy, lengthening her stride to keep up. 'Swords? Honestly? For *really real?'*

'I have no idea what that's about!' the Doctor yelled back at her.

'Yes, you do!' Amy objected. 'You always do!'

'Well,' the Doctor shouted over his shoulder, sprinting hell for leather, 'I suppose I could speculate that the Ice Warriors are an ancient and martial society that takes great pride in preserving and maintaining the traditions of weapon-craft honed by their ancestors, and that the use of ancient, bladed combat weapons suggests an intent to ritually slaughter or ceremonially execute! But I didn't think that would be a particularly

cheerful thing to say while they were chasing us!' he added.

At least half a dozen Ice Warriors were doggedly following them down the length of the gallery. Still more had appeared at the hatch. The nearest Warriors seemed to be calling out to them. They were making strange, guttural noises, at least, perhaps uttering warnings, or issuing orders for their fleet quarry to halt or surrender. It was hard to tell. Each bark sounded less like words, and more like the pneumatic spit of a torque wrench driven by compressed air.

Arabel was lagging behind the Doctor, Samewell and Amy. Her long and heavy winter skirts were seriously encumbering her.

'Come on!' Samewell exclaimed, grabbing her by the arm and propelling her ahead of him. He looked around in time to see Amy trip over the lip of a deck plate and sprawl headlong.

'Go!' Samewell yelled to Bel, and darted back to help Amy.

She had winded herself. He hauled her to her feet.

'Come on!' he begged.

'O-OK!'

'Are you hurt?'

'I banged my knees,' Amy said, fighting to draw a breath.

'You've got to keep running!' he insisted.

They looked back.

An Ice Warrior was just twenty metres away. It came around the end of a row of vats, saw them, and raised its sword in a braced, two-handed grip, hilt high, the blade tipped down, like a ninja with a katana. Or whatever those swords in the kung fu movies Rory liked were called. Katanas? Kanteenas? Katonas?

The Ice Warrior didn't break stride. It seemed to accelerate, as if it was charging them.

Amy and Samewell fled, his hand clamped firmly around hers.

Leading the furious escape, the Doctor spotted an exit hatch in the end wall of the farm gallery. It was exactly the same as the hatch they'd entered the gallery by, except that it was shut.

It was the only way out.

He ran up to it, shoe-sliding the last few steps so he slammed into it. The hatch was sealed tight, but there was another palm-checker built into the frame. It hadn't been tampered with or bored through. It was in full working order.

The Doctor slapped his right hand flat against the plate. A neon glow travelled up the metal under his hand. Then red lights began to flash in all four comers of the door and an angry klaxon sounded repeatedly.

The door did not recognise his print.

It wasn't going to open.

'Ah,' said the Doctor. For a split second, he started to reach for his sonic screwdriver. Then he remembered that it was a waste of time. The Ice Warriors were far too close.

Arabel arrived beside him, and Amy and Samewell were just behind her. The Doctor turned to the terrified Arabel, grabbed her by the wrist, and jammed *her* right hand against the palm-checker. A neon glow travelled up the metal under her hand. There was a click, and then a hiss, and the hatch opened.

The Doctor bundled Arabel into the hatch, and then grabbed Amy and Samewell as they ran up, and shoved them through too. He turned in the open doorway, and took one last look at the advancing Ice Warriors. He grinned.

'Warriors of the Tanssor clan!' he cried out to them. 'Warriors of the Tanssor clan line of the Ixon Mons family, inform your warlord that the *Belot'ssar* greets

him!'

They stopped in their tracks and stared at him. He threw a cocksure salute, stepped backwards through the hatch and pressed the palm-plate. The klaxon sounded again, and the red corner lights flashed. The hatch did not shut with the dramatic flourish he'd been going for.

'Still got to sort that part out,' he acknowledged, pointing to the lock mechanism. The Ice Warriors started forward with renewed determination, raising their blades.

Amy reached past the Doctor and pressed her hand against the plate. A neon glow travelled up the metal under her hand. There was a click, and then a hiss, and then the hatch clanged shut in the faces of the Ice Warriors, locking them out.

The Doctor looked at Amy. They were nose to nose.

'How did you know that would work?' he asked.

'I didn't,' she said.

'Good thing it did, though, eh?' he pointed out.

'I would think so,' she replied.

They both jerked back a step as several echoing blows were delivered to the other side of the hatch.

'That'll keep them out for a moment,' said the

Doctor.

'What if they cut through the lock like they cut the other ones?' Amy asked.

'Oh, they will,' said the Doctor. 'But now we have a head start. And it's because you're human.'

'What?' asked Amy.

'It's because you're human,' the Doctor repeated.

'And for those of us who aren't fluent in non-sequitur?' Amy asked.

'You could operate the hatch,' explained the Doctor, 'because the palm-checker recognised your genetic code as human. It's the same reason that Bel could open the door. Humans built this, so human gene-codes work the locks.'

'Even human genes as old as mine?' asked Amy.

'Gene-code is gene-code,' replied the Doctor.

'Wait,' said Arabel, flustered and looking at the Doctor, 'if you can't open the lock, doesn't that mean you're not human?'

The Doctor glanced awkwardly at Amy. 'Ah, yes. How do I explain that best?' he began.

Before he could answer, Amy shrieked, 'Samewell!'

Samewell's outstretched hand was hovering above the palm checker. At Amy's protest, he snatched it

back.

'I just wanted to see if it would work for me too,' he said. He pouted.

Several more dull but herculean blows landed on the other side of the hatch and made him recoil.

'I'd best try it on another door, though, eh?' Samewell added.

'I think that would be healthier for all of us,' the Doctor said.

He looked around, and took stock of where they had ended up. It was a service room, full of metal shelves and hoppers. The shelves were racked with tools and equipment that looked part surgical and part horticultural. The hoppers were packed with mechanical spare parts wrapped in plastic. He picked up a few items and examined them.

'We can't really stay here, Doctor,' Amy said.

'No, we can't,' said the Doctor.

To reinforce her point, the banging on the hatch ceased, and was replaced by a high-pitched and very unpleasant wailing noise. It was like a dentist's drill with the volume turned up.

'No, we *really* can't,' said the Doctor. 'That's a focused sonic drill. They'll be through that hatch in two

shakes. Two shakes if we're lucky. Probably more like *one shake.* Let's get going.'

They hurried away from the painful noise to the end of the service room. There was another hatch, shut tight.

'Now you can try it, Samewell,' said the Doctor.

Samewell put his hand on the plate. The hatch opened.

Samewell looked extremely pleased with himself.

Passing through the hatch, they entered a gloomy corridor lit by a line of blue overhead lights. It stretched away in both directions. From the left came the roar of heavy turbine machinery. The Doctor took them to the right. He got Samewell to close the hatch behind them.

'That's two barriers they've got to get through,' the Doctor remarked.

Feeling a little more secure, they walked briskly down the corridor.

'What was that you were saying to the Ice Warriors before we slammed the door in their faces?' Amy asked.

'Oh, you know. Saying hello.'

'How do you say hello to an Ice Warrior?' she asked.

'Um, "Hail, Ice Warrior"?'

'You're not as funny as you think you are,' said Amy.

They reached another hatch. This time, Amy opened it.

The room on the other side was dark, but quickly woke up as automatic lights flickered on. The air smelled stale and slightly dusty. It was a large room, lined in pale white shipskin, with a wide, flat floor covered in odd patterns. The patterns were circles and spirals, inlaid in a fine, contrasting metal filament. There was another hatch at the opposite end of the chamber, and one side of the space was fitted with complicated workstations and consoles. There were also two chairs facing the console station. The chairs had high, padded backs and raised armrests. The area looked like the cockpit of a spaceship.

The Doctor walked over to the workstation area. He seemed intrigued by the control systems. 'Go and see what's behind the next door,' he said to the others. 'Don't go too far.'

'What are you going to be up to?' Amy asked.

'I'm going to look at these,' he said, leaning over the consoles. He ran a speculative finger along the fascia above a line of touch-sensitive pads. Dust came away

on his fingertip. 'I think I know what this is,' he said.

'In fact, I'm *sure* I know what this is.'

'Really?' asked Amy.

'Give me a moment,' said the Doctor, investigating further. He gestured over his shoulder. 'Look at the floor, Pond. Look at the patterns on the floor. Where have we seen that before?'

'Uh, I don't know?' Amy said.

'Think about it. We've seen it recently.'

'Really? I don't know.'

'Then hang on a minute,' he said. He sat down in one of the high-backed chairs, laced his fingers together, and cracked his knuckles. He had already pressed a few switches at random. Several indicator lights had come on. The consoles began to hum with power. 'Allow me to show you what this is.'

'Have we really got time to stop and play around, Doctor?' Amy asked.

'We've got time to stop and play around with this,' said the Doctor. 'If,' he added, 'this is what I think it is. And, as I believe we established, it is.'

Arabel and Samewell returned from their examination of the next door.

'It's another hallway,' said Bel, 'and then some

rooms beyond that. We didn't go too far.'

'Good,' said the Doctor. He adjusted some more controls.

'What are you doing?' asked Samewell.

'He's showing off,' said Amy.

'I'm not,' said the Doctor. 'I'm bringing these long-dormant systems back online, and juicing them up to operational power.'

'Yeah, but he's not telling us why he's doing that, or what it is he's doing it to,' Amy said to Bel and Samewell, 'and the reason is because that way it'll be more impressive when it *finally* does whatever it's going to do.'

'No harm ever came from a bit of dramatic anticipation,' said the Doctor. 'There is an art to the building up of suspense. A prince from Denmark told me that.' He gently tinkered with a few more settings, and then picked up a chunky remote-control device that slotted into a socket in one of the consoles. He stood up.

'Come on,' the Doctor said to them. 'Come over here. Into the centre of the room. Hurry now.'

Power was building. They could all hear the ambient tone. Light levels in the room were starting to

increase too.

'What have you done?' Amy asked.

'It's safe, I swear,' said the Doctor. He made a tiny adjustment via the remote control.

The hum of the mounting power levels turned into a lazier throb, like a slowly cycling energy pulse.

'OK,' he said. 'Ready? Hold on to your hats.'

'I don't have a hat,' said Samewell.

'You should get one,' replied the Doctor. 'Hats are cool.'

The Doctor pressed an activator on the control pad.

The light in the room around them altered quite dramatically. Not only did it shimmer and dim, the actual quality of the light seemed to change, becoming softer and less intense. It was like a scene change in a West End play. The effect was so odd, Arabel, Samewell and Amy all murmured in surprise.

Then they realised what they were looking at. They blinked. They saw what the chamber around them had very suddenly turned into. Their second murmur of surprise was much louder and more appreciative than the first.

The Doctor grinned.

They weren't in the same room any more.

They were somewhere else entirely.

Rory wondered if he ought to risk some more soup. He didn't really want any more soup. It was good soup, but he was full. However, having some soup was about the only thing to do apart from just sitting there, and he was fed up doing that. At least having some soup was doing something. It was an activity.

The assembly hall was very quiet. Vesta was snoozing. Sol Farrow was watching the flames crackling in the nearest firebucket. Sol had already been back for seconds and thirds of soup, and Rory was worried there might not be much soup left if Sol decided to go for fourths. Then there *really* wouldn't be anything to do to pass the time except sit around and be bored.

The night wind was picking up outside, driving the snow against the windows. Rory could hear it pattering like grains of sand. It was a proper blizzard out there. Things were warm enough close to the firebuckets, but there was a wickedly cold draft blowing in under the main doors of the assembly, and odd, fluting wind sounds were coming from the chimney vents up in the eaves.

'They're taking a long time,' said Rory.

'Guide's answers are often hard to find,' replied Sol. He cleared his throat and leaned forward to warm his hands at the fire. 'Particularly when... you know.'

'It's a problem you've never met before?' suggested Rory.

Sol nodded.

'Have you really never seen winter until now?'

'Not until these last three years,' said Sol. 'We knew what winter was, of course. Knew what it had been like on Earth before, because of the records. And it always got a bit colder this season, regular. But we'd never seen white and ice before.'

'Right.'

'Vesta tell you that, did she?'

'Yes,' said Rory.

'They have winters where you come from, then?' asked Sol.

'Yes, actually,' said Rory. 'Where I come from, they have them quite often. We're used to them. But this is pretty fierce. It's a bad winter. And, obviously, any winter's going to be a bit worrying if you're not supposed to have them.'

He got up and looked over at the doors that led into the Incrypt.

'Maybe I should just go and see how they're doing?' he suggested. 'I'm sure I could help.'

'It's not allowed,' replied Sol. 'The council voted.'

'What are they looking at exactly?' asked Rory.

'Well, the words of Guide, of course,' said Sol, sitting up and looking at Rory with a frown. 'The covenant that Guide provides for us, as is held in the Incrypt. Guide knows an awful lot. More than any of us, and it usually takes quite a time and a lot of cleverness to sort of sift out what Guide is telling us.'

'This is your Guide Emanual?' said Rory.

'That's right,' said Sol. 'Surely you have the same in your plantnation?'

'We've got tourist information points and a weekly free paper.'

'What?' asked Sol.

'Never mind,' said Rory. He paced a little. 'I wish I knew where Amy and the Doctor were. I hope they're OK. The Doctor always knows what to do. I keep trying to imagine what he'd say or do if he was here.'

'Hello! Hello? Can anybody hear me?' the Doctor's voice suddenly boomed out across the assembly.

Sol and Vesta both leapt up in considerable dismay. The voice seemed to come from directly behind

Rory. He turned around very slowly.

The assembly hall was bathed in a soft yellow radiance, warm but bright, that was somehow shining out of the floor, the walls, and the ceiling. Glittering traceries of energy had appeared along the circular metal patterns inlaid in the wooden floor, and up the seams in the hall's beams and roof posts.

The centre of the hall was no longer the assembly room at all. It appeared to have become, in the blink of an eye, part of a very modern-looking white chamber. The row of benches in front of the council rail had turned into what looked like a computer workstation complete with two high-backed chairs.

Rory was standing halfway inside the assembly hall, and half in the new, white room.

The Doctor, beaming from ear to ear, was right in front of him, along with Amy and two young Morphans that Rory didn't recognise.

'Doctor!' Rory cried.

'Rory!' exclaimed the Doctor in delight. 'Rory Williams Pond!'

'Not my actual name,' smiled Rory.

'I was confident we'd make contact with someone,' the Doctor said excitedly. 'I didn't dare hope it would

he you!'

Dumbfounded, Amy rushed towards Rory so that she could hug him. He spread his arms wide to meet her.

'How did you get here?' Rory laughed.

The anticipated hug didn't go according to plan. Much to their mutual surprise, Rory and Amy passed through each other like ghosts. They stopped in their tracks, turned and looked back at each other.

'What just happened?' asked Rory.

'Why can't I touch Rory?' demanded Amy. 'What's going on? It's spooky! I just went right through him. How can I not touch him if we're in the same room?'

'Well, because you're not actually in the same room at all,' said the Doctor.

Amy reached out her right hand to feel Rory's face. She succeeded merely in pushing her hand through his head.

'Urn, OK, stop doing that,' Rory told her.

'That's so freaky!' Amy exclaimed.

'Yeah, still, stop it,' said Rory.

'You must be in the assembly in Beside,' said the Doctor. 'Well done, Rory. That's exactly where I needed you to be.'

Rory gave a no problem shrug as though he'd planned it all along. 'Where are you?' he asked.

'We're in Firmer Number Two,' replied the Doctor, 'which is one of the big mountains you would be able to see from the window if it wasn't night-time. Actually, we're deep inside it, so you wouldn't see us anyway.'

He was speaking rather too loudly and rather too clearly, as though he was using a telephone with a poor connection.

'Remember the mountains, Rory?' he asked. 'The strange ones that I didn't think were mountains?'

'I do, Doctor,' said Rory.

'Well, they're *really* not mountains. They're giant machines called terraformers, or terramorphers, or whatever you want to call them. They've been set up to change this world. To re-engineer its climate and make it more Earth-like.'

'Earth *-esque,* surely?' smiled Rory.

'Touché, Mr Pond,' laughed the Doctor. 'So, it'll take years to do. Centuries. It's a long-term project. Anyway, we're inside one of them.'

'OK...'

'Specifically,' the Doctor said, 'we're in a

telepresence communications chamber. We found it by accident. It's part of a communications network that probably once linked all the Morphan communities.'

'It's like you're here,' said Rory, still not quite believing his eyes.

'It's conjury!' Sol Farrow murmured. He and Vesta were rigid with fear. Their eyes were very wide.

'Who's that?' asked the Doctor.

'That's Sol Farrow,' said Rory. 'And this is Vesta.'

'Vesta Flurrish!' the Doctor cried. 'Alive and well! How fantastic is that? Very pleased to virtually meet you, Vesta. As you can see, I've got your sister and Samewell here with me. They're perfectly safe. Well, they're relatively safe. Well, they're here with me.'

Vesta and Bel stepped forward and gazed at each other.

'I was so worried about you,' said Bel.

'You look like you are made of light,' said Vesta.

'She is!' cried the Doctor. 'To you, she is! The telepresence system generates a live hologram field. It's like 3D. I *love* 3D! Especially the cardboard red and green glasses. Anyway, it creates a hologram of you, where you are, here with us, and vice versa, so we all seem to be in the same room.'

'It's really freaky,' said Amy, poking her fingers into Rory's face.

'Again, stop it,' he said. He looked back at the Doctor. 'What's going on, Doctor?' he asked. 'There's something really bad happening in this town. There's this thing—'

'With red eyes!' Vesta blurted.

'Yes, red eyes,' Rory agreed.

'That would be an Ice Warrior,' the Doctor nodded, suddenly more serious. 'I'm sorry to say, there's more than one of them around. It *is* a real problem, Rory. They're a threat to the Morphans, to all human life on Hereafter. We've got to work together to stop them. Throw a spanner in their works.'

'How?' asked Rory.

'First things first. You need to get the Morphans ready,' the Doctor told him. 'The Ice Warriors are mobilising. They could strike at any moment.'

'Is Elect Groan there, Vesta?' asked Bel. 'Can you fetch him? Any other members of the council... Chaunce, Old Winnowner, anyone? They have to hear about this.'

'They're all in the Incrypt, consulting the word of Guide,' said Vesta.

'Now that is very interesting,' said the Doctor.

'Go and fetch them, Vesta!' Bel urged. 'Hurry now!'

Vesta nodded, and darted away. Sol was still staring in wonder at the luminous figures.

'Doctor?' said Rory.

'Yes, Rory?'

'I - hang on. Amy, *seriously*, stop poking your fingers through my nose. Doctor, why are you talking so urgently?'

'Am I?' asked the Doctor.

'Yeah,' said Rory. 'It's almost like... you haven't got very much time.'

'Well, there's no time like the present!' the Doctor enthused. He really wasn't very good at lying sometimes.

'Doctor...' said Rory, a cautioning note sounding in his voice. His *take me seriously* voice.

'What?' ask the Doctor.

'What's that high-pitched noise?' asked Rory.

In the hologram field deep under Firmer Number Two, the Doctor looked back at the shimmering, lifesized image of his friend and shifted uncomfortably.

The noise of the focused sonic drill was steadily getting louder.

'Hang on, Rory,' the Doctor said. 'Stay right there.'

He walked out of the glow of the hologram field and over to the open hatch. The noise was echoing down the corridor. The Ice Warriors were already cutting through the second of the hatches that the Doctor and his companions had locked in their path.

'Samewell?' he called.

The young man ran over to join him.

'Keep watch here,' the Doctor told him. 'As soon as the Ice Warriors appear through that door down there, yell out so we know about it, and then lock this hatch. It'll slow them down again.'

'Guide is my witness, I understand,' Samewell said.

'As soon as you've done that, I want you to take Amy and Bel out the other way, out the way you scouted. Got it?'

'Yes, Doctor.'

'It's important.'

'Cat A. I understand. Where will you be while this is happening?' Samewell asked.

'I'll be right behind you,' the Doctor said. 'But I need you to lead the way so you can open the doors with your hand.'

'Ah,' said Samewell, nodding. 'Right. Got you.'

The Doctor left Samewell standing watch at the door and walked back into the hologram field.

Amy and Rory were face to face, looking at each other.

'I was really worried about you,' Rory said to her.

'And I was worried about you,' she replied. 'You only went back for a coat. How hard is that?'

'Uh, I think *you* got captured while I was getting a coat,' said Rory, 'so this whole series of disasters started with you.'

'It started with the TARDIS missing Christmas by about a bajillion years, actually,' replied Amy.

'Well, I was really worried anyway,' said Rory. He raised his hand, palm open, fingers slightly spread, as though he was pressing it against a window pane. Amy echoed the gesture with her left hand, so they could 'touch' hands through the holographic medium. An elasticated mitten dangled from her cuff.

Their hands passed through one another. They both stepped back sharply, shaking their heads.

'I thought that would be, like, really sweet,' said Rory, disappointed. 'I thought it would be a proper moment, like in those films when the hero's in jail, and the girl visits him, and they put their hands up on either

side of the glass partition of the visitor's cubicle? You know, like that?'

'Yeah,' she said.

'But it was just a bit creepy,' he said.

'It really was,' she agreed.

Rory saw the Doctor reappear.

'What is that noise, Doctor?' he asked.

'Nothing to worry about,' said the Doctor cheerfully.

'He's just saying that so you won't worry,' said Amy.

'What *is* that noise?' asked Rory.

'The Ice Warrior Men are drilling through doors to get at us,' Amy told him.

'What?' Rory asked, very alarmed.

The Doctor looked at Amy. His shoulders drooped and he sighed sadly.

'It's not even like it's a difficult name to remember, like Jagrafess or Castrovalva,' the Doctor said to her. 'I mean, a friend of mine just *made it up* on the spot. Ice Warriors. It's simple. It's not hard. Why are you having such trouble with it?'

'Probably the stress of the situation,' Amy snapped.

'Is she telling the truth?' Rory asked the Doctor.

'Not at all,' replied the Doctor. 'The word "men" has never had anything to do with their name. They're just

plain Ice Warriors.'

'God help me... Are they drilling through the door, Doctor?' asked Rory insistently, trying his best not to shout.

'They *are* doing that,' the Doctor admitted.

'Doctor! You've got to get out of there!' said Rory.

'Has Vesta gone to get the council?'

'Yes,' said Rory.

'Well, we haven't really got time to wait for them to come back,' said the Doctor thoughtfully. 'Listen, Rory, it's actually all very simple. The Ice Warriors want this planet. They want to conquer it and colonise it. They want to take it from the Morphans. But they need it to be colder. Tons colder. They don't want the Morphans warming it up to make it all Earth-like. Their idea of Earth-like isn't like the Morphans' idea of Earth-like, and—'

'Skip that part, Doctor,' Amy advised.

'OK, Rory,' said the Doctor, focusing. 'The crucial point is that the Ice Warriors have sabotaged the terraformer systems. They've reset them to plunge Hereafter into an ice age.'

'Hence the sudden winters,' said Rory.

'Exactly,' the Doctor agreed. 'An ice age will suit the

Ice Warriors just fine, but it will wipe the Morphans out. I'm not prepared to allow that. So... I'm going to sabotage the Ice Warriors' sabotage, Rory. I'm going to undo what they've done, and accelerate the global warming processes of the terraformers. I'm going to make Hereafter a *very* uncomfortable place for any Ice Warriors to be.'

'OK,' Rory nodded.

A sudden bang reverberated down the corridor outside.

'They're through, Doctor!' Samewell yelled from the door.

'Close that hatch, Samewell,' the Doctor shouted back, 'and get everybody through into the next room like I told you to!'

'Yes, Doctor!' Samewell replied. He put his hand on the palm-checker and the hatch slammed shut.

'Sorry. Really running short on time,' the Doctor said, turning back to Rory. 'Like I said, I need to reset the terraformers, but they're a huge and very complicated set of systems. I don't want to cause a global disaster by, you know, fiddling around. I need plans or schematics to work from. Rory, all the Morphans I've met keep mentioning "Guide". Guide,

as I understand it, has principles that they live by. Instructions. I think they're actually referring to a *real* guide, to codified information that the original colonists left behind to cover all the details of operating and maintaining the systems.'

'I reckoned that too,' Rory agreed. 'It's such an important part of their lives, they treat it as a sort of holy text. I've heard them calling it "Guide Emanual".'

'Emanual, or *e-hyphen-manual?'* the Doctor asked, intrigued.

'Exactly,' said Rory. 'E-manual. An electronic manual. I think it's stored digitally. There's a place adjoining the hall called the Incrypt. That's where they keep it.'

'I need a copy,' the Doctor said.

'Well, they won't let me in there,' Rory replied.

The high-pitched dentist's drill whine had started howling on the other side of the hatch. The Ice Warriors were right outside.

'Come on!' Samewell said to Amy and Bel. 'We've got to go! Right now! Doctor says so!'

'Doctor?' Amy said to the Doctor.

'Rory, I need the e-manual,' the Doctor said.

'I understand that,' Rory replied, 'but they won't let

me near the Incrypt.'

'You've got to try, Rory,' said the Doctor.

'OK.'

'Rory, I mean it,' the Doctor said. 'We can't stay here. It's not safe any more. We've got to go. I'm going to try to find another telepresence terminal like this one. Soon as I can, I'll contact you again. Please, have the e-manual ready for me then!'

'I'll do my best, Doctor!'

'I know you will,' the Doctor said.

'Doctor, we've got to go now!' Amy yelled.

'Amy!' Rory called out, trying to see her past the Doctor. 'Please be careful! Just be careful!'

'You know me,' she called back, waving to him as she tried to pull the Doctor away. She hoped he couldn't see the tears in her eyes. It wasn't fair she could see him but not touch him. It wasn't fair that they were going to have to say goodbye and start running. It wasn't fair that she might not actually get to see him properly ever again.

'Go! Go!' the Doctor told Amy. 'Get Samewell and Arabel out of here and run!'

'Not without you!' Amy protested.

'Oh my god!' cried Rory, utterly powerless to act.

'It's not a choice. *All* of you run!'

'I've got to disable this terminal so the Ice Warriors can't access it,' the Doctor said. 'Amy, go!'

Reluctantly, Amy ran across to the far door where Samewell and Arabel, both trembling with fear, were waiting. 'Come on, Doctor!' she yelled.

The Doctor was adjusting the remote control, resetting the systems of the main console. 'See you later, Rory Williams Pond,' he said, grinning at Rory's holographic image.

'Please, Doctor, go!' Rory said to him, looking anguished and helpless.

Something exploded. It made a loud noise like a gunshot. A sudden stench of burning metal filled the chamber. The drill had bored all the way through the lock.

The hatch shunted open and two Ice Warriors shoved their way into the telepresence chamber. One had a broadsword. The other had an ornate battleaxe, the haft and blade all forged from one gleaming piece of metal.

Arabel screamed.

'Doctor, run!' Rory and Amy both yelled at the same time.

The Doctor turned, and saw the Ice Warriors bearing down on him. Two more had come into the room behind the first pair. The Doctor threw the remote-control handset at the Ice Warriors in an attempt to distract them, and then made to dart away sideways to reach Amy and the two Morphans.

The Ice Warrior with the axe hurled his weapon with extraordinary strength and grace. Superb martial skill sent the gleaming axe spinning through the air, making a chopping, swishing sound as it flew. It was thrown wide, not to kill the Doctor, but to force him back and cut off his escape.

The Doctor recoiled with a cry of alarm as the axe whooshed past him. It struck the console and buried itself, blade first, in the control bank. The impact blew out the power systems. The holographic image of the assembly hall, of the frantic Rory and the speechless Sol, blinked, flickered and vanished. A hot shower of sparks blew out of the console in a small explosion that knocked the Doctor to his knees.

Amy wailed, 'Doctor!'

The Doctor tried to get up. A massive green pincer clamped his right wrist. He cried out in pain.

'Go! Amy, go!' he yelled, struggling to pull free.

She was in the hatchway, staring at him in utter horror. Samewell and Arabel were trying to pull her out of the room, but she was fighting them off.

'Doctor!'

'Get out of here!' the Doctor bellowed back.

'Not without you!'

'Lock the door and get away! Save Bel and Samewell! Run!'

The other Ice Warriors were advancing on the doorway. In another few seconds, they would have her, and the door would be wedged, and they'd all be prisoners of one of the Doctor's most implacable adversaries.

'Please, Amy,' the Doctor cried. ' *Please.'*

His eyes met hers. One last look.

One last communication that was beyond words.

Amy cried out in despair, and finally allowed herself to be dragged back through the hatchway by the two young Morphans. She rammed her hand against the palm-checker, and the hatch slammed shut in the faces of the Ice Warriors.

It closed with such force, a single woolly mitten on a severed strand of elastic fell onto the deck.

Chapter

13

Brightly Shone the Moon

That Night

The Doctor got to his feet. This was not an entirely voluntarily action. The Ice Warrior holding him by the wrist raised its arm, and the Doctor had no choice but to follow. It was either that or have one of his four favourite limbs snapped off.

The Ice Warrior that had hurled the axe plodded over to the smouldering console and wrenched the weapon out. A spatter of sparks, like the spill of a foundry bucket, followed it and fizzled on the deck. The other Warriors formed a loose and menacing semicircle around their prisoner.

'Hello, everyone,' the Doctor said, trying to seem friendly and open to any options. 'Why don't we go around the room so that everyone can introduce themselves? You start.'

The Warrior with the axe returned and faced the Doctor. He raised a large pincer fist and shoved the Doctor in the chest. With a grunt of surprise, the Doctor was driven backwards into one of the padded

chairs.

'Sit?' the Doctor gasped, the air having been rather compressed out of his lungs. 'Excellent idea. Excellent. I've been on my feet all day.'

The Ice Warrior brought the axe down across the Doctor's middle. It came so close to cutting him in half, the Doctor yelped and breathed in hard. The axe blade bit into one of the chair's arms so that the handle was fixed across the Doctor's body, like a solid metal seat belt. The Doctor was pinned behind it. He wriggled his arms back behind the haft so he could press his palms against it and keep it at bay. There wasn't much room for movement.

'What, um, happens now?' asked the Doctor, looking up at his towering captors. Impassive red-lensed eyes glared down at him.

'Oh dear. I have this horrible hunch that it's going to involve killing me, or lopping bits of me off,' said the Doctor, 'and if that's the case, I just want to say, you know, that's not necessary. Or cool. I'm a reasonable sort. I'm sure we can talk about this—'

'Wordsssss!' hissed the Ice Warrior who had pinned him in place with the axe. The pronouncement was arctic. It was as though every single letter had been

chipped out of glacial ice and then forced from the Warrior's downturned slit of a mouth by a blast of polar air.

'W-words?' asked the Doctor.

'Your elimination isss inevitable,' said the Ice Warrior, 'but firssst, there will be an exchange of wordsss.'

Each syllable of the statement could not have been any colder if the Warrior had personally fetched them from a walk-in freezer. They seemed to smoke in the air like dry ice. The sibilant lizard-hiss of the Warrior's voice sounded like the scrape of a blade being worked on an oiled whetstone.

'You're... proposing to have a conversation with me?' asked the Doctor.

'The conversssation will not be conducted by me,' hissed the giant.

'Oh, interesting! Who do I get to talk to, then?' asked the Doctor.

A figure had entered the chamber behind the half-ring of Warriors. He was not as tall or as broad as any of them, but he was just as imposing.

The Ice Lord wore a regal, form-fitting body suit of titanium mesh. It was the colour of verdigrised brass

pipework or pellucid green sea-ice. His armoured mantle and long storm cloak were of a darker green, as though they had been woven from the needles of an evergreen tree. His sharply domed helm was like the nose of a burnished artillery shell. It was made of gleaming white steel with a faint threadwork of pale green. It looked as though it could have been sculpted out of the finest Pentelic marble. The eye slots were lensed with jade glass.

The Ice Lord came and stood in front of the Doctor.

'You talk to me,' he said. His voice was deeper than the wheezing, hissing tones of the bulky Ice Warriors. It reminded the Doctor of a distant rumble of thunder, like a ferocious ice storm lurking below the horizon of a bleak antarctic waste.

'Great!' declared the Doctor. 'Let's start! What shall we talk about? I think the weather's always a polite topic of conversation. Shall we discuss the weather? Been a bit chilly of late, hasn't it? Real overcoat weather. What do you think?'

'Tell me about the new weapons you have arrayed against us,' said the Ice Lord.

'I don't know anything about any weapons,' answered the Doctor, 'new or otherwise.'

'Disinformation is not a good strategy to employ,' said the Ice Lord. 'New weapons have been produced and used. Account for them. Explain them.'

'I can assure you,' replied the Doctor firmly, 'I have no knowledge of any weapons deployed against you. My only participation in your business today has been trying to prevent you from killing me and my friends.'

The Ice Lord stared down at the Doctor for a long time, longer than any human would have held a silence. He didn't seem to be having any difficulty comprehending the remark. It was more as though the Ice Lord believed that, if he waited long enough, he would get the answer he was waiting for.

This, the Doctor knew, was entirely typical of Martian psychology. As a result, he did not respond. He fixed his gaze directly on the jade eye slits and waited. You didn't win an argument with an Ice Warrior by arguing. You won it by staying silent for longer. Behind the jade lenses, black eyes gleamed like oiled obsidian.

'This is disinformation,' the Ice Lord said at last. 'In the surface woodland earlier tonight, you evaded one of my combat echelons. You, and three other mammals.'

'That could have been anyone,' replied the Doctor.

'It was you. Heatprints do not lie. It is verified.'

'They were chasing us,' said the Doctor. 'They didn't seem all that friendly. We were obliged to run.'

The Ice Lord remained silent for another over-long moment.

'When you refused to surrender,' he said eventually, 'they fired upon you. You withstood their sonic disruptors. I return to my original question. Tell me about the new weapons that have been arrayed against us. New weapons that can repel sonic attack.'

'Oh, that?' said the Doctor. He tried to appear relaxed, leaning back and attempting to casually cross his legs. The axe wedged across his chest rather cramped his style. After a couple of tries, he was forced to put his leg back down and pretend he'd only been trying to pick lint off his coat. 'I wouldn't characterise that as a weapon. It was an improvised defence against your unprovoked and lethal assault.'

'Make an account of it,' the Ice Lord growled.

The Doctor sighed. 'I can show you,' he said. He shrugged helplessly against the axe that caged him in the chair. 'Can I get to a pocket?'

The Ice Lord looked at the attending Warrior and

nodded. The Warrior reached forward, grasped the axe and plucked it out of the chair.

The Doctor breathed out, smiled, and fished around in his coat for his sonic screwdriver. He took it out and showed it to the Ice Lord.

'A simple multifunction tool,' he said. 'Not a weapon. Attacked by your cohort, I adjusted it to generate a noise-cancelling field that blocked the effects of their disruptors. Passive resistance. Do you understand me? Not a weapon.'

'Demonstrate.'

'I can't. Fending your warriors off pretty much exhausted this device. It is non-functional.'

There was another long pause.

'On the other occasions,' said the Ice Lord, 'were devices such as this employed?'

'What other occasions?' asked the Doctor.

'Do not evade.'

'I'm not,' said the Doctor. 'What other occasions?'

'This conflict is escalating,' the Ice Lord said. 'The latest advance gained by your side is a resistance to our sonic weapons. It has required us to re-equip with blade weapons. Are you the architect of this tactical advantage?'

'Oh, come on,' said the Doctor. 'I block your sonic blasters during one skirmish in the woods – a frantic improvisation, I might add - and you revise your entire combat strategy? You dump your high-tech guns in favour of ritual blades? Seriously, I'm impressive, but I'm not *that* impressive.'

'Your arrival in this theatre coincided with the sudden negation of our sonic arsenal. Can you deny that you are the architect of this tactical improvement?'

'You are misreading the facts,' said the Doctor.

The Ice Lord did not reply. At an almost leisurely pace, he crossed to the other high-backed chair, rotated it to face the Doctor, and sat down.

'Where have you and the other new arrivals come from?' the Ice Lord asked.

'We arrived yesterday,' replied the Doctor.

'All of you?'

'Yes.'

'How?'

'In my ship,' replied the Doctor.

The Ice Lord paused again. 'We have not detected a ship. Orbital surveillance is continuous and comprehensive. We have not detected a ship, certainly not a ship large enough to contain all of you.'

'Well, there you are,' said the Doctor. 'I'm telling the truth. Your instruments must be wrong. So, you're monitoring the human population on Hereafter?'

'Of course.'

'How do you distinguish between the existing population and any new arrivals?'

'Heatprints do not lie,' said the Ice Lord.

The Doctor nodded. 'Ah, yes, right. Everyone's thermal image is as unique as a gene-scan or a retina,' he mused. He turned his head and took a wistful look at the hatch that Amy had sealed behind her. The woolly mitten was on the deck where it had fallen. 'Or a palm-print,' he added, ruefully. He looked back at the Ice Lord. 'All right. This is interesting. You detected heatprints that didn't match any on your database, so you despatched troops to find and identify the new arrivals.'

'Precise monitoring must be maintained,' replied the Ice Lord. 'Constant threat evaluation and analysis keeps us ahead in this war.'

'This *cold* war,' the Doctor said. He sat back. 'How long have you been here?'

'Ten Earth years.'

'But only in these last few weeks or so have you

revealed yourselves?'

'Alterations made to the climate engines were sufficient at first. We were waiting for the effects to manifest. However, we have been forced to become more proactive.'

'Your plan has run into difficulties?' pressed the Doctor.

'It has turned into open war.'

'Has it?' asked the Doctor. 'Has it indeed? Again, and I'm sorry if I offend, you are simply misreading the facts. You are traumatically altering the climate of this planet and, as a direct consequence of that policy, you are going to exterminate a sentient population. Progressive genocide. I'd say that puts you in a difficult place, morally speaking, just to *begin* with. Then I arrive, and get caught in the middle, and my actions are misinterpreted as your victims fighting back. Now, in your eyes, it's a war? You are simply misreading the facts.'

'And you know more than you claim to know,' replied the Ice Lord. 'In this complex, just a short time ago, you addressed my Warriors as you fled from them. Ssord, repeat the words the prisoner used.'

The Ice Warrior with the axe took a step forward. In

a compressed air-hiss, he said, 'The captive ssspoke thusss: "Warriorsss of the Tanssor clan line of the Ixon Monsss family, inform your warlord that the *Belot'ssar* greetsss him."'

'Explain how you know these things,' the Ice Lord said to the Doctor.

'It's obvious,' replied the Doctor. 'You are of the Tanssor Clan. The characteristic pattern of scales and ridges on your breastplates and helmets is unmistakable. The emblem on your pectoral confirms that your clan allegiance is to the Ixon Mons family, which is one of the most code-honourable families on Old Mars. It's a simple matter of observation.'

'And also a simple matter to conclude that you have encountered my species before,' said the Ice Lord.

'I never claimed I hadn't.'

'Your knowledge of our culture is considerable. You know how to fortify against our weapons. You understand the lineage and hierarchy of our bloodlines. You distinguish the polymorphic traits of our physiology, a habit seldom known in other races. And you know words in our language. Belot'ssar.'

'Indeed,' smiled the Doctor. ' *Belot'ssar*. I was wondering when we'd get to that.'

'As I was wondering why you used the term.'

'It means *cold blue star,'* said the Doctor.

'Curiously enough, I know what it means,' replied the Ice Lord. 'Why did you use the phrase in, so it seems, reference to yourself?'

'Because that's how I'm known to your people,' replied the Doctor. He looked quite pleased with himself. 'Traditionally, I mean. Your people, particularly the Ixon Mons family, know me as *cold blue star.* It's a reference to the ship I travel in. The title is an honorific. It shows me to be a true and lasting friend to the Ixon Mons dynasty, but also a fair and daunting adversary.'

The Doctor rose to his feet. The Ice Lord stood to face him. The Doctor drew himself up, narrowing his eyes to look at the Ice Lord. He was fearless. The gloves were off. It was time to play his ace.

'I have been a friend to the dynasties of Mars,' said the Doctor, 'but I have also been a foe. I have fought them many times and I have won *every* time. Ice Lord Azylax, warlord of the Tanssor, personally named me the *Belot'ssar* as a mark of respect, so that future generations would know me and tread carefully. The situation on this planet will end. You will disengage,

and you will cease your prosecution of the human population. That's your final warning. I am everything your ancestors warned you about. I am the *Belot'ssar.'*

The Ice Lord stared back at him. There was no expression.

'Never heard of you,' he said.

'What?' asked the Doctor.

'I am Ixyldir, warlord of the Tanssor Clan,' said the Ice Lord. 'There has never been a warlord called Azylax. We know nothing of a respected foe known as *the cold blue star!*

'But...' the Doctor began.

'Hang on...' he floundered.

'That's just not...' he added.

He sat down and rested his forehead on his hand.

'Time travel,' he murmured. He slapped his palm against his forehead repeatedly, scolding himself.

'Lets you down *every! Single! Time!* I have *got* to learn to set my watch!'

He looked up at Ixyldir and the Ice Warriors.

'All that,' he said, gesturing vaguely into the space where he had just been standing, as if to encapsulate his bold and defiant performance. 'All of that showy-offy stuff, could we just pretend that never happened? I

can see from your faces that we can't. You're going to kill me.'

'You were going to die anyway,' replied the Ice Lord.

'Yes,' said the Doctor, 'but now I'm going to be really annoyed when it happens.'

'We've got to go back!' Amy raged, fighting against the firm grips both Samewell and Arabel had on her.

And do what, precisely?' Arabel asked.

'Save him!' Amy blurted. 'Rescue him! Poke the Ice Men in the eyes with sticks! I don't know!'

'Ice Warriors,' Samewell corrected her.

Amy turned on him. 'Oh, really? *Really? Now* is the time to focus on that? *Is* it, Samewell Crook? Is it really?'

Arabel pulled Amy away from the cringing Samewell. 'You're upset,' she said.

'Damn right!' Amy cried. 'We just left the Doctor to die! We left him trapped there, surrounded by the giant green lizard things! That's just... just.

'Just what?' asked Bel.

'It's not how I do things!' Amy declared.

She turned away from them. She was breathing hard, trying to control her anger. They'd been running

for a few minutes, following an access corridor into a warren of tunnels that had finally led out onto the walkway where they were now standing.

In the vast gulf of the rock-cut cavern below them, huge turbines pumped and rumbled. There was an amber cast to the light. Vapour rose up around the suspended mesh walkway that supported them.

'He's always there for me,' Amy said quietly. 'He's always got my back. He's crossed time and space to save me, more than once. And I just ditched him.'

She turned to face them. Samewell and Arabel were watching her with great concern. Amy held up one baggy sleeve of her duffel coat.

'Also, I lost a glove,' she sniffed, 'which I know is a completely different scale of things to be upset about, but it's annoying, you know?'

'He will be all right,' said Bel.

'How do you know that?' asked Amy.

'Well,' said Bel, 'I haven't known your Doctor for anything like as long as you have. I realise that. But just in the short time I've been around him, I've been filled with a confidence. He knows what he's doing. I've... I've never met anyone who seems so capable.'

'Bel's right,' said Samewell. 'The Doctor wanted us

to go. He told us to. He was quite plain about it. It was the only way.'

'Those things, they had us cornered,' said Bel. 'He wanted us to escape.'

'That won't be much consolation to him when he's dead,' said Amy.

'But it might be consolation to him as he's dying,' replied Bel.

Amy breathed out hard. She turned away, gripped the metal handrail and stared down into the pit where the mighty terraforming engines were performing their slow toil.

'He always has more than one plan,' she said quietly.

'How do you mean?' asked Bel.

'He wanted us to escape,' said Amy, turning back to face them. There was a new expression on her face. 'I mean, of *course* he did. He was trying to save us, and he'd lay down his life for anyone. But I know the Doctor. He's like one of those chess grand masters, you know?'

They both shook their heads.

'They plan their moves way in advance,' said Amy, carrying on anyway. 'They know what they're going to do long before they get there. It was all getting a bit

frantic back in that room, and he definitely wanted to save us... and I know there was a lot of improvising going on as well, because I've seen what he looks like when he does that. But he always has more than *one* plan.'

'So?' asked Bel.

'He stayed there so we could get away,' said Amy. 'You said it yourself, Samewell, he told us to. He needs us to do something. He needs us to carry on with the plan while he keeps the Ice Men busy.'

She checked herself and glared at Samewell.

' *Don't* correct me,' she advised.

He shrugged and raised his hands.

'Sabotage their sabotage,' Amy said. 'That's what he said he was going to do. Sabotage whatever sabotage the Ice Warriors had caused. Get the Firmers working again. We need the Guide to do that, to set things right. Rory's going to get that for us.'

'If he can,' said Bel.

'My husband won't let me down,' said Amy. 'So the first thing we need to do is find a way to regain contact with Rory.'

She seemed galvanised and ready for action, as if she'd got her mojo back.

'I think that's the second thing we need to do,' said Samewell.

'Why?' asked Amy. 'What's the first?'

Samewell pointed. Four Ice Warriors had appeared on another walkway high above them. The Warriors looked down, spotted them, and then began to search for the nearest route down.

'I think getting away from here might be number one,' said Samewell.

'Amy! Amy! Doctor!' Rory yelped. He clamped his hands to his forehead in hopeless panic, and turned in a full, bewildered circle. The centre of the assembly hall had become the centre of the assembly hall again. There was no sign of the polished white room with the fancy console and the high-backed seats. There was no scintillating bleed of light coming out of the metal seams inlaid in the floor and the beams. There was no sign of the Doctor or Amy.

There was no sign of the axe-wielding Ice Warriors.

'I don't believe this!' Rory exclaimed.

'Where...' Sol began. He frowned. 'Where did they go? They were just here. Where did they go? Come to that, where in Guide's name did they come from in the first place? That's conjury, that is! Cat A conjury!'

'Oh, get over it!' Rory moaned. 'Did you see? Did you see what was happening? Those tilings! Those Ice Warrior things! They were right there! They were going to capture them!'

He looked at Sol. A flicker of true and terrible realisation crossed his face.

'They could be dead already,' he murmured.

'What happened? What happened?' Vesta asked, rushing back into the room. Bill Groan and the rest of the council followed after her.

'Rory, where did it all go?' Vesta asked, grabbing him by the arms.

'Never mind,' Rory said.

'I will strike you on your sorry head with a mallet again, so I will!' she declared. 'Where did it all go?'

'It got cut off,' Rory told her. 'Just cut off. The Ice Warriors got them.'

'The Ice Warriors?' asked Vesta.

'Yes, the thing from the woods!'

'With the red eyes?'

'Yes!' said Rory.

'Oh, Guide preserve me, they got Bel too?' Vesta asked.

'It was hard to tell,' said Rory. 'But it didn't look

good.'

Vesta looked like she was going to burst into tears.

'Explain this commotion to me now,' Bill Groan insisted. 'Vesta came banging on the Incrypt door raving about a window into another place, with people in it!'

'What unguidely horror have you perpetrated?' Winnowner asked Rory.

'Do me a favour!' Rory snapped, rounding on her and the other muttering council members. 'Give it a rest with the *unguidely* this and the *conjury* that, OK? OK? It's not helping! My wife, and my friend, and *her* sister Rory pointed at the anxious Vesta - 'and some other bloke, just got captured by the same creatures who are messing your world up and trying to kill you off. Captured... or worse.'

'What did your friend call them?' Vesta asked quietly.

'Ice Warriors,' said Rory. 'The Doctor said they were called Ice Warriors.'

'But how,' Bill Groan asked, struggling, 'did this happen here in the assembly?'

'It was a technological link,' Rory explained. 'Transmitted hologram images. A communication

system. Do any of these phrases mean anything to you?'

'Some of them are words that we know from our Guide Emanual,' said Chaunce Plowrite nervously.

'That is true,' admitted Winnowner.

'It was like they were here!' declared Vesta.

'It was, Elect,' said Sol Farrow. 'I would not have believed it except I saw it with my own eyes. As big as life, here in the hall. They spoke to us, and could hear us and see us. It was Arabel and Samewell, and the strangers from this morning, the odd fellow and the girl with the red hair.'

'What did they say?' asked Bill Groan.

'I swear I did not understand much of it,' said Sol. 'He speaks fast, the odd fellow does, and uses words I haven't the notion of. But it was clear to me that it was Cat A urgent.'

'I understood what it meant,' said Rory. 'These things are called Ice Warriors—'

'These things with red eyes, like we both saw in the woods?' asked Vesta.

'That's right,' said Rory.

'I said they was monstrous,' Vesta said, nodding and looking earnestly at Bill and the council. 'Most

ferocious thing I have ever seen, it was. I barely escaped with my life.'

'The Ice Warriors have their sights set on Hereafter,' said Rory. 'That's how the Doctor explained it. They want to colonise the planet themselves.'

'They are invading our world?' asked Jack Duggat.

'They are,' Rory agreed. 'They're going to wipe the Morphans out. This plantnation... *all* of the plantnations. They want this world to be colder, to suit them. But that means that the Morphans will die out, because it will be too cold to survive.'

'They cannot have our world,' murmured Bill Groan in horror. 'We have worked so hard for it. So many lifetimes have gone by, toiling to shape Hereafter. They can't have it.'

'The Ice Warriors have got into your Firmers, Elect,' said Rory. 'They've mucked up the way they work. They've... sort of made them do the reverse of what they were built to do in the first place.'

'They're making everything colder?' asked Chaunce. 'Our own Firmers?'

'That's why the white has come,' said Bill. 'That's why winter has claimed us.'

'Exactly,' said Rory.

'We will stop them,' Bill Groan said firmly.

'That gets my vote,' said Rory.

'What did the Doctor say we should do?' Bill asked him.

Rory shrugged. 'He said that your Guide Emanual had the answer,' he replied.

'Of course it does!' said Winnowner.

'The Doctor said that if he could consult the Guide, use it, he could reset the Firmer systems to undo the damage the Ice Warriors had done.'

'And how would this be achieved?' asked Bill Groan.

'He wants me to look at the Guide,' said Rory. 'He wants me to access it, and be ready for him when he communicates again. *If* he communicates again. Look, he said he was going to find another part of the communication system to use, to talk to us. Of course, that was before he got captured... Look, the Doctor's pretty amazing. He won't let us down. Let's get the Guide ready for him when he links through again. And if he doesn't, then we come up with some other plan.'

Bill Groan thought hard and then, grudgingly, nodded.

'You're proposing to let this stranger into the

Incrypt?' Winnowner asked Bill incredulously. 'You're suggesting we let him read direct from our Guide Emanual and show it to others?'

'This man is a Nurse Elect!' Vesta exclaimed.

'I don't care what he is,' replied Winnowner. 'This cannot be permitted.'

'If our world is under attack,' asked Bill Groan, 'and our way of life also, and this is the only way to save it, then who are you to say that it cannot be?'

'Who are you trusting, Elect?' Winnowner asked. 'Guide have mercy on us all, you're trusting the word of these strangers! We have only their say that there are any of these menacing *Ice Warrior* things! None of us have seen them.'

'I have, actually,' said Sol Farrow.

'Rubbish, Sol!' said Winnowner. 'You can't even say what it was you saw!'

'I have too, Winnowner Cropper,' said Vesta firmly.

'You were frightened by something in the dark woods, child,' said Winnowner. 'I ask you all, in Guide's goodness, we don't know what we face here. But we do know there have been three strangers come among us from afar. A new star moves through the heavens, and then they show up, unannounced,

claiming to be well-wishers come along in the dead of a winter's night.'

She glared at Rory.

'Maybe *they* are the real Ice Warriors,' she said. 'Did *that* occur to any of you? If they hope to damage our Firmers, and make winter come for ever, and so wipe us out, then maybe this is their conjury trick to get their hands on our Guide Emanual! What's *wrong* with you all?'

'Winnowner is right,' said Chaunce Plowrite. 'If this man and his friends are our enemies, then we should not let them near Guide's words. We'd be handing them the very secrets that they crave. We'd be giving them the means to destroy us.'

Everyone looked at Rory, even Vesta.

'Oh, come on,' he said. 'Please. *Please.* Do I look evil? I can't do evil. I can barely pull off dangerous. This is one of those moments when you've just got to trust something. I'm on your side.'

'I believe him,' said Vesta Flurrish. 'I honestly do. What about you, Elect?'

Bill Groan had bowed his head. He was gazing sidelong at Rory as though that might make it easier to see some kind of answer or eternal truth.

They waited for him to reply.

The main doors to the assembly burst open, letting in a wall of icy chill. Able Reeper, one of Jack Duggat's men, hurtled in along with the bitter cold, lugging his scythe. He was extremely agitated.

'Elect! Elect!' he shouted. 'You must come quick now! You must come and see!'

'What's the commotion, Able?' Bill Groan asked.

'Hurry, Elect!' the man replied. 'Come and see!'

They all followed him outside into the snowy yard. It was bitterly cold. Rory inhaled, and the air stabbed into his lungs like a frozen knife. Able Reeper strode off across the town yard towards the Back Row and the hedges that ran along the perimeter of the Spitablefields. He kept beckoning them to follow. A lot of other Morphans were out too, roused from their beds. They were flocking in the same direction, some carrying solamps.

It was surprisingly bright anyway. The blizzard had stopped, leaving the world under a deep blanket of snow, a thick white layer that flowed like a soft duvet over the roofs and trees and tops of walls. It looked like the deepest, richest royal icing that had ever decorated a Christmas cake.

With the snowfall stilled, the sky had cleared. It was like black glass overhead, a polished darkness that sucked the heat out of every breath and made brief, trailing clouds. The sky was so clear, it seemed to Rory that he could see every single star that there had ever been. The spiral pattern of a galaxy filled half the sky, a trillion, trillion winking points of light. The moon was up, huge and bright, a dazzling silver disk low in the sky. The moonlight was intensely bright. It was bathing the entire landscape with a radiance that meant they could all see for miles. The snow cover was reflecting and amplifying the glow.

Some of the stars were moving. Rory could track at least three of them, very high up overhead, moving in formation.

A fourth was descending.

It was growing brighter by the second. Its descent was steady and level, perfectly controlled, but it made no sound. The Morphans came to a halt and gazed up at the star as it moved directly overhead and then swung to the east until it seemed to hang above Would Be. It looked as large and as bright as the moon. The light shining from it picked up the slopes of Firmer Number Two, making the sleeping darkness of the

mountain stand out against the night sky.

It wasn't a star. Rory knew that. If you squinted against the light, you could see faint details of the structure behind the lights, vast and sleek.

'A star has come loose and fallen down the sky,' said Vesta.

'That's a spaceship,' said Rory.

The Morphans of Beside, almost every single one of them, stood in the snow and looked up at the vast, bright shape suspended in the eastern sky.

'What is that sound?' asked Bill Groan suddenly.

They listened.

Noises were echoing up the valley from the direction of Would Be. Similar noises could be made out coming from the Spitablefields, Farafield and the Fairground beyond the heathouses. They were ugly, ragged noises, the sound of fierce blows being traded by formidably strong opponents. They could hear the blunt force of weapons cracking armour and breaking bone. They could hear grunts of effort and cries of fury, metal striking metal, the crash and shiver of objects colliding with snow-laden trees.

They couldn't see it, but there was some kind of battle going on in the woodland, a vast, medieval-style

battle involving close quarters, hand-to-hand violence.

'Who's out there?' asked Bill anxiously. 'Who's fighting?'

'Some of our men?' Jack Duggat ventured. 'The patrols? The nightwatchers?'

'It sounds like hundreds of them!' Bill exclaimed.

He turned, pale in the moonlight, and faced his assembled community.

'Morphans of Beside, listen to me. If the fighting moves this way, we're in danger. We have to fall back and protect ourselves.'

'How do we protect ourselves from a star, Elect?' someone shouted out. Some of the community's children were sobbing.

'Just do as I say, for Guide's sake,' Bill replied. 'Come back into the plantnation. The bams and the grain stores are the most strongly built. Take the children there to make them safe. Sol, get guards up to protect the cattle sheds and the stockhouses. Jack, gather a force of men and form a line here and halt whatever comes our way.'

People started to move, obeying his orders, but many simply wanted to linger and stare at the hovering star. Rory edged back through the crowd a little. He

was no longer prepared to wait for permission, nor was he going to rely on his powers of persuasion.

Everything was about to get very confused and busy. He was going to head directly back to the Incrypt and get access to the Guide. The Doctor was counting on him.

He was about to slip into the shadows of the hedgerow and risk running when things suddenly got worse.

Several long, slicing beams of energy speared down from the hovering ship. They made a keening, screaming noise that split the air. Where the beams struck, large plumes of fire belched up inside the wood. Rory, aghast, saw the black skeletons of trees silhouetted by each vivid fireball. The sounds of the blasts - gritty, ground-shaking roars of fury – echoed back to them. The ship was firing its main weapons at ground targets.

Total panic gripped the Morphans. Screaming and shouting, some carrying children, they began to scatter in every direction.

Rory watched the ship bombard the wood with its battery weapons for a few moments. People ran past him. He could feel the overpressure of the distant

concussion as a gusting wind against his face. The ship seemed intent on devastating the entire landscape.

He made his decision.

Rory didn't stop running until he'd reached the assembly. There was no one inside. He could hear the panic and commotion in the streets of the plantnation. He could hear the crump and boom of the bombardment. Each blast vibrated the ground and made the building tremble.

'Where are you going? Rory? Where are you going?'

He turned and saw Vesta in the doorway.

'I have to help the Doctor,' Rory said.

'What is happening, Rory?' she asked, coming forward. 'Is it the end of the world?'

'Not if I can help it,' he replied.

'Is it the Ice Warriors?' she asked. 'Have they begun to kill us?'

'I think they might have,' he said.

'Do they intend to blow us asunder with fire from the sky?' she asked. 'Guide have mercy on us, I thought they would rather rip us apart with their teeth and talons first!'

'Well, they don't really have those, do they?' asked Rory. 'More sort of big green clamps for hands.' He

mimed them.

She frowned at him.

'What big green clamps?' she asked.

'Like pincers.'

'Who do?'

'The Ice Warriors! Come on, Vesta. The big, green,

scaly thing in the wood? With the red eyes?'

She stared at him, bewildered.

'It had red eyes, right enough,' she said slowly, 'but

the thing I saw was not green or scaly.'

'Oh,' said Rory, his shoulders sagging. 'All this time,

I don't think we've been talking about the same thing at

all.'

Chapter

14

Born to Raise the Sons of Earth

Born to Give Them Second Birth

Ssord, the Ice Lord's axe-wielding lieutenant, handed a communicator pad to his master. Ixyldir studied its compact display.

'Does he have an axe because his name is Ssord?' the Doctor asked, sitting in the high-backed chair with his chin in his hand. 'I'm just saying, it might get confusing if Ssord had a sword. Is that why you gave him an axe?'

Ixyldir tilted his head to regard the Doctor. 'For a mammal that is about to be put down, you are remarkably talkative,' he said.

'Oh, but that's precisely why!' the Doctor enthused, jumping to his feet.

The Ice Warriors around him tensed slightly, thinking he was about to attack their clan lord. Ixyldir briskly raised an armoured hand to call them off.

'You intend to kill me anyway, so I don't believe it really matters what I say,' said the Doctor. 'It's a very liberating feeling, in fact. I could insult you to your

face, couldn't I, lizard-lips? It's not going to make a lot of difference. I mean, it's not going to make things worse. Death is death.'

'There are things worse than death,' said the Ice Lord.

'Really? Name one.'

'Dishonour.'

The Doctor threw back his head and laughed.

'I *knew* you were going to say that,' he chuckled. 'I love it when Ice Warriors talk about honour and dishonour. It's all so terribly serious and profound. My old buddy Warlord Azylax was forever banging on about it, all the time. I would just roll my eyes. You Ice Warriors can be so pompous on the subject.'

'There is no Warlord Azylax,' said Ixyldir.

'No, unlucky for me,' the Doctor agreed. He sighed. 'No, there *isn't*. At least, there isn't going to be for about another 9,000 years. I realise that now. I got my Galactic Migration Eras mixed up. I didn't know if I was coming or going. Or if you were coming or going. Anyway, my timing's bad, and that sucks for me, because there isn't a single Ice Warrior on this world or any other who can vouch for my credentials.' He looked squarely at Ixyldir. 'But you *will*, by the time

we're done here,' he said, and winked. 'I promise. You will have acquired respect for me. As a friend, or as a foe. Which one of those it turns out to be depends entirely on you, Lord Ixyldir of the Tanssor clan.'

'By the time we are done here,' replied the Ice Lord, 'this world will be an ice-locked haven, and you will be a headless corpse rotting in one of the vile meat vats in this facility. You do not impress me, or scare me, *cold blue star.'*

'Then let's talk about dishonour some more,' suggested the Doctor. 'I mean, it is such a popular topic with your kind. You take it so seriously, yet it is so malleable to you.'

'Malleable?' echoed Ixyldir.

'It means pliable or easy to reshape.'

'I know what it means.'

The Doctor looked at the other Ice Warriors.

'Honour is a code you live by... until it becomes inconvenient,' he said.

Ssord raised his axe.

'Stop!' the Ice Lord ordered.

'You see?' said the Doctor. 'Your man here was going to chop down an unarmed prisoner, just because that unarmed prisoner happened to say something he

didn't like. How is that the action of an honour-bound warrior?'

'We are principled,' said Ixyldir. 'We are also pragmatic.'

'Yes, you are,' the Doctor agreed. 'But isn't it about time you started to balance those aspects of your culture? You're searching for a new home because Mars has gone.'

'Our home world, along with all the planets in our solar system, has been rendered uninhabitable by the maturing expansion phase of our star.'

'The Morphans of Earth are in the same boat, so to speak,' said the Doctor. ' *And* they got here first. *And* this world is more like their home world than yours.'

'It is still generally compatible with our needs,' said the Ice Lord.

'So you're just going to take their planet from them and wipe them out? How is that honourable?'

Ixyldir growled something, a hint of anger under the surface. 'Our primary requirement is the establishment of a new home world for our clan so that we may begin rebuilding our civilisation,' he said. 'We have no particular issue with the human refugees. No malice. It is simply a competition for resources.'

'Tell *them* that,' said the Doctor. 'You're killing them.'

'At the moment,' replied Ixyldir, 'it appears to be a two-way process.' He showed the display of the communicator pad to the Doctor.

The Doctor leaned forward, frowning deeply as he made sense of the data he was being shown. 'You deployed one of your ships into a low atmospheric holding position. You're... firing at surface targets. Ixyldir, you've committed forces to an open ground offensive!'

'And why might I have done that, *cold blue star?'*

The Doctor blinked. 'I don't... Wait, how can that be? You're fighting something. You're fighting something that's fighting back!'

'Your emotional nuance is interesting,' said Ixyldir. 'I am no expert in mammalian microexpression, but your surprise seems quite genuine. I imagine, however, that this is because you are a trained spy and infiltration agent. I offer you one last opportunity to cease your constant disinformation. I agree to make your death rapid and painless. Tell me the location of your ship.'

'My ship?'

'Where is it concealed? How many more military operatives are you carrying aboard it?'

'Wait,' said the Doctor. 'Wait, wait, wait, wait, *waitaminute!'* He started to pace, disconcerted. 'You said you were maintaining a watch on the planet. You've been monitoring the human population on Hereafter since you arrived ten years ago?'

'Yes.'

'Logging them all individually by their heatprints?'

'Yes.'

'Roughly speaking, in that time, what has the population of Hereafter been, Lord Ixyldir?'

Ixyldir paused, considering the pros and cons of tendering the information. Finally, he answered: 'Combined, the three human settlements represents a global population of around 19,000.'

It was the Doctor's turn to pause. His mind was racing. 'But just recently,' he continued, 'the nature of the struggle has changed? It's forced you out into the open?'

'Yes.'

'You've detected new arrivals, like me and my friends?' asked the Doctor.

'Yes,' growled Ixyldir, growing impatient.

'And you distinguish between the pre-existing population and the new arrivals by heatprints?'

'Heatprints do not lie,' said the Ice Lord.

The Doctor sighed. 'Bear with me for one moment more, Lord Ixyldir,' he said. 'We're about to have a really crucial exchange of information. Everything that happens from now may hinge upon it. I'll start by telling you something, in the spirit of a free and frank debate. I arrived here, in my ship, with two companions. That's it. A total of three new arrivals. We got here yesterday.'

Ixyldir turned his head slowly and looked at Ssord. Then he looked back at the Doctor.

'Lord Ixyldir,' said the Doctor. 'According to your scans, how many new heatprints have appeared in addition to the existing human population here?'

The Ice Lord permitted himself a glacial pause before replying. 'One hundred and fifty,' he replied.

'Down here!' Amy yelled.

She was leading the way, her duffel coat flying out behind her. Samewell and Arabel were running to keep up.

'They're coming after us, Amy!' Bel cried.

Amy looked back. Thirty-five metres behind them,

two Ice Warriors had appeared on a gantry platform and were following the three humans onto the grilled shipskin bridge that arched across a vast turbine chamber. In the past five minutes, Amy and her companions had been chased through four large compartments just like it. Each time they had emerged onto a platform or bridge at a different level. Each time, they believed, briefly, that they might have finally shaken off their pursuers.

But each time, the Ice Warriors had appeared, relentlessly searching and hounding.

The bridge they were currently crossing spanned a large chamber at a particularly high level. Several other walkways criss-crossed the chamber at different levels below them. Far below the bridges, at the bottom of the yawning drop, there was a huge cavity that looked like the bowl of an active volcano. Molten fire seethed and roiled down there, an abyssal well of flames. They could feel the heat rising through the space of the compartment. High overhead, unfurled like sails, titanic thermal vents were arranged to conduct and direct the heat.

'We can't run for ever!' Samewell yelled.

'Watch me!' Amy cried.

Arabel let out a shriek of despair. 'Look!' she yelled.

Amy skidded to a halt. They were about halfway across the long, railed walkway. Three more Ice Warriors had just appeared at the other end of the span. Ice Warriors were closing in from both sides.

They were trapped in the middle of the bridge.

There was nowhere to go.

'What do we do?' asked Samewell.

'We surrender, don't we?' Arabel said.

'No!' said Amy firmly. 'They won't take us alive.'

She looked around. She looked up. She grabbed the guard rail, leaned out, and looked down. 'We jump,' she decided.

'Are you mad?' asked Samewell.

'To kill ourselves so they can't capture us?' asked Arabel.

'No!' replied Amy. 'What do you take me for? I'm not going to stupid well kill myself! We jump down onto that!'

She pointed.

The closest of the bridge spans beneath them was only a few metres below. They were almost directly above the point where two bridges intersected.

'We'd never make it!' objected Arabel. 'We'll jump

and miss!'

'We won't miss!' replied Amy. She started to hoist herself up over the rail.

'It's too far!' Samewell cried.

Amy got her heels on the edge of the walkway, holding the handrail against the small of her back. She stared down. It did look far too far. It looked *ridiculously* too far. It was like jumping off a tightrope and hoping to land on another tightrope.

'We can do it!' she insisted.

She looked at them. Arabel and Samewell were clutching each other and staring at her in dread.

'Come on!' Amy yelled. 'Look how close they're getting!'

Bel and Samewell looked around. The two Ice Warriors behind them were approaching rapidly. The three coming the other way weren't so close, but there wasn't a lot in it.

'Any better ideas?' Amy yelled. 'No? Then come on! Now!'

Uttering moans of reluctance and fear, the two Morphans scrambled over the rail next to her.

'It is so high, I fear I shall faint,' said Bel.

'Try your best not to,' said Amy. 'OK. OK. I'll go

first. I'll show you how it's done. OK.'

Perched, they looked at her.

'OK, I'm going,' said Amy. Her hands didn't seem to want to let the handrail go. It really was a very, very long way down. What had she been thinking? She couldn't make *that*. It was crazy. It was crazy, crazy talk. Even if she *did* jump, and didn't miss the bridge, she'd break a leg, or a neck, or something else that she was fairly unwilling to damage.

'A-Amy?' Bel said. Her voice was trembling. 'Amy, are we going to do this?'

'Yes. We are. Hang on. OK. OK, I'm... OK. Ready? I'm ready. OK. Here we go.' Amy swallowed hard.

'Actually,' she said, 'I think it might be a bit too far after all.'

She looked around at Bel and Samewell, in time to see an Ice Warrior reaching a huge, green pincer-hand out to grab them.

'Geronimo!' she yelled.

And jumped.

'Rory?' Vesta asked. 'Rory, what are you doing?'

Rory didn't reply immediately. He was moving around the assembly hall, shifting benches and knocking on wooden wall panels.

'Not green?' he asked. 'The thing you saw? In the woods? *"It"?* It wasn't big and green?'

'It was a monster,' Vesta said. 'A big monster with claws and red eyes, but it was nothing at all like the green thing you described.'

Rory tapped his way along a panelled wall, listening.

'It's fair to say,' he said, 'that I haven't been entirely up to speed on this situation since I arrived. But now I *really* don't know what's going on. I mean, I don't have a clue. Is it possible that we're in the middle of some sort of war that we didn't previously know about?'

'I don't know, Rory,' said Vesta. Every flash and boom from outside made her jump and look towards the windows. The night sky was underlit orange with flame from burning woods. The noises of battle were getting closer.

'What are you doing?' she asked again.

'I'm looking for...' Rory began. He dropped his hands and stood back from the beam he'd been examining. He shook his head. 'I don't know what I'm looking for,' he said. 'The Doctor turned this room into some kind of communications station. A receiver. I just thought that... if he could turn it on from *his* end, I

should be able to do the same here. There should be controls, hidden somewhere, I suppose. Perhaps boarded up or panelled over because the Morphans didn't know what they were for. I thought I might be able to find them.'

Vesta shrugged. 'Guide only knows,' she said. She cleared her throat. 'Rory,' she said. 'I think that I want to go and hide in the barns with the others. I think that's the safest place.'

He looked at her. 'Yes, that makes sense,' he said. 'You should do that. Do you want me to take you there?'

'No, I can find my way. Will you be all right?'

'Yes, I...' Rory's voice trailed off. He looked at her with such intent, she laughed and shook her head in confusion.

'What?' she asked.

'I said I was looking for the controls, and you said...?'

'I don't know, Rory!' she said.

'You said, "Guide only knows."' He grinned. 'I'm not thinking straight. I wanted to try and get this place running, so that once I had got the Guide, I had a way of sending it to the Doctor. But I can kill two birds

with one stone. Your Guide Emanual will *tell* me how to operate this station. It stands to reason.'

He turned and walked towards the rear doors of the assembly hall. Vesta ran after him, her skirts gathered up.

'Are you really going in?' she asked. 'Into the Incrypt?'

'Yes,' he replied.

'Even though you are not one of the Beside council, and permission was expressly denied to you?'

Still walking, Rory gestured towards the hall windows and the rumbling flash of the onslaught.

'Hello?' he said. 'Bigger picture?'

'But—' she began.

'Vesta, I think that the solution to all the many and troubling problems plaguing us right now are in that room. The Doctor thinks so too. So I'd better get on and find them, because the alternative isn't really very pretty.'

Rory reached the double doors. Old Winnowner, the keeper of the key, had padlocked them shut. He started to rattle and push at them, but they were very solidly made and securely fastened.

He put his shoulder against them, and rammed.

'Ow,' he said, rubbing his shoulder. 'That's not going to work. I need something else. An axe, or a crowbar.'

He turned from the doors and found himself nose to nose with the business end of Jack Duggat's hoe.

'Whoa!' he said, recoiling.

'You was trying to break into the Incrypt,' said Jack, holding the farming implement like a rifle with a fixed bayonet.

'It's really important I get in there,' said Rory.

'It really is, Jack!' Vesta agreed.

'It is Cat A vital you do not,' replied Jack emphatically. 'Look what I found!' he called out over his shoulder. 'Just as you feared.'

Old Winnowner came in through the main doors of the hall behind him. She was out of breath from hurrying through the snow. 'I see,' she said.

'Good thing you sent me here direct,' said Jack, not relaxing his grip on the hoe.

'Vesta Flurrish, I'm surprised at you,' said Old Winnowner as she hobbled over to them. 'Betraying everything we've worked for.'

'Give him the key and let him within, Winnowner Cropper,' said Vesta firmly. 'Can you not see he's a friend?'

'I have no proof of that,' Old Winnowner replied.

'Then can you not see what is happening outside?' asked Vesta. 'Fire from out of the sky! Falling stars! The world's end! A ruin and disaster the like of which we have not even imagined! Will you just watch it happen or will you try to stop it?'

'It is being stopped,' said the old woman. 'That is all there is to it. It is in Guide's hands. Now, Jack, bring them. We'll take them to the barn with us.'

'I'm not going anywhere!' cried Rory.

'Really?' asked Jack.

Rory backed off. 'Put like that, and with such a large hoe involved in your answer, perhaps I am,' he agreed.

Jack and the old woman marched them out of the assembly. The cold clear night outside was bright orange from the flames. The ship, still hovering, was continuing its merciless prosecution of ground targets in the hills. They could smell smoke from the burning trees.

In the town yard, the snow was trampled. The fires were casting long, twisting shadows across the broken snow. The sounds of battle were closer. It appeared that some of the town's outbuildings down by the heathouses were now on fire.

'Quickly, get them to the barns,' Winnowner said.

'I think you're placing excessive faith in the protective properties of agricultural storage,' said Rory.

Vesta yelped.

On the far side of the town yard, two Ice Warriors had appeared. Both were brandishing swords. Ignoring the four humans outside the assembly hall, they strode across the yard as though they were pursuing an unseen adversary through the lanes of the houses opposite. They disappeared from view behind the granary.

'Oh, Guide!' said Vesta. 'Were they those things?'

'Ice Warriors,' said Rory. He could see the fear on the faces of the Morphans. Even Winnowner's resolve had been checked by a glimpse of the towering aliens.

'Are you going to start believing me?' Rory asked.

Winnowner didn't answer. There was a sudden and terrible mauling sound from the direction of the granary. It was the noise of bodies slamming into wooden wall boards, of timber splintering, of armour denting.

'Get them back inside, Jack,' said Winnowner.

'Hurry now.'

Before they could turn, something appeared on the

roof of the granary. It had leapt up there in a bound, like a big cat. It prowled down the thick slump of snow on the building's roof, moving on all fours, and then sprang down into the yard and started to come directly towards them with a lithe, loping stride.

Its eyes flashed red in the firelight.

Rory, Vesta, Winnowner and Jack all backed away until they felt the assembly doors behind them.

'Oh, Guide! Oh, Guide!' Vesta babbled, stricken with fear. 'That's it. That's what I saw in the woods. That's *It!'*

Amy landed, on her feet, in the middle of the bridge walkway. She made a resounding clang that shivered the metal work of the entire structure. Slowly, she opened her eyes, waiting to see if there were any clues like, for example, excruciating pain, that could tell her if she'd broken anything significant or killed herself. She seemed to be intact.

'Oh my god, it worked,' she marvelled.

Another loud clang shook the bridge and almost knocked her off her feet. Samewell had landed beside her. His landing wasn't quite as clean as Amy's. He went sprawling as he hit, and nearly rolled off the walkway under the lowest bar of the guard rail. Amy

squeaked and grabbed him, dragging him back.

'Don't fall! Don't fall! Don't fall!' she yelled.

'Am I safe? Have I landed?' Samewell asked, entirely flummoxed by the whole experience.

Amy looked up in time to see Bel falling towards them. Her long skirts billowed out as she dropped, almost like a parachute canopy.

Arabel missed the walkway. She had jumped a little too short.

Amy cried out in horror as Bel bounced off the outside of the guard rail and went over backwards, plunging away into the fiery depths.

She stopped falling with a violent lurch. Her skirts had caught up on the rail. Bel was hanging upside down off the side of the bridge by her winter skirts, her arms thrashing.

'Grab her! Pull her up!' Amy shouted. She and Samewell rushed to the rail and leant over, each of them reaching down with both hands trying to snatch and grasp at Arabel's inverted form.

There was a long, slow and ominous sound of cloth tearing.

'Arabel Flurrish!' Samewell yelled. 'If you fall and die, I'll kill you!'

'Grab my hand!' Amy shrieked. 'Bel, grab my hand!'

Arabel's skirts tore. Unhooked from the brief suspension of the guard rail, she fell.

Amy and Samewell both grunted out air as they took her weight, straining to hold on. Samewell had both his hands wrapped around Bel's right hand. Amy had one hand locked around Bel's left. Arabel was hanging by her arms the right way up.

But Samewell and Amy were leaning out so far, Bel was in danger of pulling them both over the rail.

'Get her up!' Amy bellowed.

'I- *can't!'* Samewell gasped.

'Get her up now! Now! Before we all go over!' Amy told him, snorting with effort. 'On three! One... two... three!'

They hauled.

Bel came up in a rush, and all three of them tumbled backwards over the guard rail and ended up piled on the walkway in an untidy heap.

'I am *not* doing that again,' said Bel.

Amy got up. The thwarted Ice Warriors were glaring down at them from the bridge above.

'Come on!' she urged the two young Morphans. 'Get up and get going!'

Samewell helped Bel to her feet, and they both followed Amy along the span towards the exit hatch.

The metal walkway rang under their feet.

Suddenly, it did more than ring. It shook as though the bridge had been hit by a wrecking ball. The violent shiver made all three of them stumble.

Amy looked back.

An Ice Warrior was slowly getting up out of a crouched position on the walkway behind them. It had jumped from the walkway overhead, and landed roughly where they had landed.

There was something completely terrifying about the giant green thing's unexpected display of agility. It rose to its full height, and reached its right fist up to its left shoulder to grasp the hilt of the sword secured across its broad back. It drew the sword, raised it, and started to pursue them all over again.

'You know that thing I keep saying?' Amy yelped.

'What, run, you mean?' asked Bel.

'Yeah,' said Amy. 'Can we just save me some time and take it as read from now on?'

A second Ice Warrior plunged like a boulder from the bridge above. It landed behind the first, missing the main platform, but impacting, as Arabel had done,

against the guard rail. Pincer clamps snapped shut around the rail to prevent it from toppling backwards into the drop. The metal railing was buckled and twisted by its collision.

Slowly, clumsily, it clambered over the bent guard rail and onto the bridge. There, it unfastened the battle-axe anchored across its back, and set off after the first.

Amy was just a short distance from the safety of the hatch. She reached out her hand so she could touch the palm-checker plate as soon as she arrived and open the door. If they could get through and close the hatch again, the Ice Warriors would have to stop to drill the lock out, and that would buy them a little more time.

The hatch began to open. She hadn't touched the plate. Something on the other side had activated the lock system.

Amy slid to a stop, and Bel and Samewell cannoned into her from behind. All Amy could think was the Ice Warriors had somehow learned how to work the locks.

Something came through the hatch and out onto the bridge facing them.

It wasn't an Ice Warrior.

The three of them screamed anyway.

'Do you know what I'm going to do?' the Doctor

asked Ixyldir. 'I can't believe I'm saying this, but do you know what I'm going to do?'

'What?' asked the Ice Lord.

'I'm going to help you,' the Doctor replied.

'Help me?'

'Help you all. There's a level to this situation that neither of us really anticipated.'

'I do not believe you can be trusted,' Ixyldir replied.

The Doctor shook his head, and snatched the communicator pad out of the Ice Lord's grip. Ssord and two other Ice Warriors reacted to stop him, but the Doctor did a little duck and weave to avoid them as if they were the least of his worries. He was busy examining the pad's display.

'You're taking a pasting, Ixyldir,' he said, reading data. 'Your slow, cold war has turned into a fast, hot one. This is not what you were expecting at all, is it?'

He looked at the Ice Lord.

'Is it?' he repeated. 'I'm not saying that you're not prepared to fight. You're Ice Warriors, for goodness sake. But this isn't the scenario you were expecting when you began your offensive ten years ago. Is it?'

'No,' said the Ice Lord.

'Escalation,' said the Doctor. 'You said it yourself. I

can help you, but only if you start cooperating with me quickly. I mean very quickly. We don't even have to trust each other completely, but if we don't get this situation under control, there are going to be an awful lot of deaths. Morphan, Ice Warrior. Unnecessary deaths. This world laid waste, possibly to the point where it is of no use to either colonial effort. Come on, Lord Ixyldir of the Tanssor clan! Be smart!'

The Ice Lord seemed to take an eternity to reply.

'What form would this cooperation take?' he asked.

The Ice Warriors behind him swung their heavy heads to glance at one another.

The Doctor grinned.

'That's the spirit, Ix! That's the spirit! You're starting to thaw, pardon the pun! This could be the start of a beautiful friendship, Ix! Can I call you Ix?'

'Most certainly not.'

'Well work on that, then. Here's what I need first. We have to find another facility like this, this telepresence communication centre.' The Doctor gestured to the chamber they were standing in. 'Ssord's handy axe-work rather ripped the stuffing out of the systems here,' he said. 'I could fix it, but it would frankly take more time than we have at our disposal.

There must be another. You've been working your way through this complex for years, cutting open doors. You must have found another one or two by now. Preferably, a more significant control room than this. This is just a secondary station. Do you know of any primary command and control rooms?'

Lord Ixyldir looked at Ssord.

'Level sssix,' the Ice Warrior hissed.

'Let's go!' the Doctor cried. 'Lead the way, Ssord. Lord Ixyldir, we'll walk and talk.'

Ssord led the way out of the chamber. The other Ice Warriors fell in around the Doctor and Lord Ixyldir as an honour guard escort.

'Walk as fast as you can!' the Doctor urged. He looked at Ixyldir. 'I need to know the details of your operation,' he said. 'It's vital. On several other occasions, I've known your people to instigate terraforming processes on target worlds. You're pretty good at it.'

'When our migration fleet entered this quadrant, this planet revealed itself to be the most likely candidate for adjustment,' replied the Ice Lord. 'Long-range observation confirmed it met the majority of our colonisation criteria. We resolved to achieve orbit, to

commence climate engineering, and then wait for the process to be completed by entering hibernation on our ships.'

'Were you planning to use seed technology to bring about climate alterations?' asked the Doctor.

'You are familiar with the technique?' asked Ixyldir, surprised.

'I've stopped it more than once, actually,' the Doctor said. 'It's very efficient, though. The destabilisation of carbon dioxide levels is often all it takes to induce a global arctic phase on an M-class world.'

They left the gloom of the tunnels and followed a broad, railed walkway around the edge of a plunging turbine cavern.

'Once we were in orbit,' said the Ice Lord, 'we realised that a human colony was already established on the candidate planet. It had been here for some time and, though comparatively small, it had constructed terraforming processors of significant size and effect. This process had been under way for several generations, and was already beginning to induce change.'

'So you thought, "Why bother setting up our own terraforming programme to work in opposition? Why

not just repurpose the one that's already there?'"

'This was deemed to be the most viable option.'

The Doctor shook his head sadly. 'This is where you and I will be forced to disagree, Lord Ixyldir. That was a pretty underhand gambit. You decide to steal a planet out from under these settlers, you coopt their terraformers to do the hard work for you, and you essentially consign them to a generation or two of long, slow, bitter extinction. You signed their death warrants, Lord Ixyldir, but you let the snow and ice do the actual killing for you. You didn't have enough respect for your adversary to pull the trigger yourself. Dirty pool, Lord Ixyldir. That's dirty pool.'

'I do not understand your reference,' replied the Ice Lord.

'It's not very honourable, is it?' replied the Doctor.

'That's what I'm saying. Theft, on a planetary scale.'

'This was not the humans' planet either. They selected it and claimed it. We were merely doing the same.'

'But they were here first, Ixyldir. It's a bit of a school playground *he said, she said* argument, I know, but do you know what? Most honour systems are built on very simple, basic concepts of ownership, or

respect, or prior claim, or of precedence. The humans were here first, Ixyldir. You decided they were in the way, and you decided to steal their technology to eradicate them. Don't talk to me about honour.'

'It was a matter of survival,' objected Ixyldir.

'Ah yes, the famous pragmatism of the Ice Warriors. You didn't mean to hurt anybody, but you were obliged to in order to survive. Lord Ixyldir, the deliberate and systematic eradication of an entire population is called genocide, and it's not regarded as especially honourable either. Not where nice people come from.'

'We had to survive! This was a viable planet—'

'You had a fleet of ships, Ice Lord. You could have gone somewhere else. The humans did not have that option.'

Ixyldir did not reply. For a few minutes, as the group continued to walk, entering a long, metallined hallway, the only sound was the tramp of feet and the rumble of the world-building engines.

'Anyway,' said the Doctor at length. 'Let's not dwell on your *not-really-very-honourable-at-all* decision-making process. You started to tinker with the terraformers. This was ten years ago. You knew it would be a gradual process that would take a long

time, but you've got plenty of that, haven't you? Hibernation systems on your starships. Lifetimes that are naturally three or four times those of humans. You could afford to play the long game. The Morphans, you know, they talk about patience a great deal. It's a fundamental quality of their culture. Not an easy, sleep-through-it-all patience like yours. I'm talking about the patience required to live and work every day, generation after generation, for a future ideal that will benefit your descendants. It's admirably selfless. Don't you think so?'

'It is... worthy of respect.'

'It is, isn't it?' the Doctor said. 'They just work towards the future. They make their contribution. They get no reward. They're just investing the effort of their lives for the good of other people they're never going to meet.'

They came out into another turbine hall, and Ssord led them up a broad metal staircase towards an upper level.

'So, your tinkering?' said the Doctor. 'You employed seed technology first?'

'Modified seed cultures were introduced to the primary terraformer systems. Initial results were

positive.'

'But you reached a tipping point eventually,' said the Doctor. 'Eventually, as the winters began to get colder, the automatic monitoring systems governing the terraformer systems began to notice there was a problem. They performed self-diagnostic reviews and identified alien properties in the system. They needed to resolve the problem, so they accessed the DNA libraries, reopened the flesh banks, and grew a brand new batch of transrats to flush out the system.'

'Vermin was our first problem,' Ixyldir acknowledged.

'Transrats are resilient,' said the Doctor. "The more you killed, the more they made. That must have become a bit of a war. A guerrilla war, going on underground in the mountains, where the Morphans couldn't see it.'

'We prosecuted the vermin. The problem took about a year to control.'

'You used standard sonic disruptors, and you were forced to destroy some of the DNA banks and flesh farms so that the terraformers simply couldn't produce as many replacement transrats?'

'Yes.'

'And that still wasn't enough, was it?' the Doctor asked. 'They're resilient, as I said. Eventually, you must have realised that you couldn't beat the transrats. You had to find a way around them so they were no longer an impediment to your schemes?'

'We were forced to select alternatives to the processes we had originally put in place,' replied Ixyldir, 'the processes that the vermin had disabled. Seed technology was no longer viable, because the vermin simply devoured it.'

'You started to actually convert the terraformers themselves? Recalibrate their systems?'

'Yes.'

'And that's when things really escalated, isn't it?' asked the Doctor.

'In here!' Ssord said abruptly.

The Doctor followed the Ice Warriors through a large hatch, noting that the palm-print reader had been drilled through.

They entered a massive, well-lit control room. There were several banks of consoles like the one in the telepresence chamber, each with a row of high-backed chairs. The chamber itself overlooked one of the secondary sequence prebiotic crucibles through a

vast plate-glass wall. The Doctor paused to enjoy the view of the giant chrome tree. Drizzle from the cloud systems swirling the ceiling of the crucible chamber pattered against the glass wall like light summer rain.

'Yes,' the Doctor nodded. 'This will do the trick nicely. A central operation nexus. Would have taken me ages to find this, especially with you lot chasing me.'

'What happens now?' asked Ixyldir. 'If you have tricked us into revealing the location of this facility to you, I will kill you myself.'

'I would expect no less,' replied the Doctor. He sat down at one of the workstations and began to play with the controls, lighting up banks of indicator functions and small hologram read-outs.

'You see, Ixyldir,' he said as he worked, 'what I think has happened is this. You tampered with the terraformers. The system detected you, and manufactured transrats to solve the problem. So you started tampering in a different way to get around the transrat problem, and the system detected that too. It hadn't got many options left, so it had to do something quite radical.'

The Doctor turned to look at the Ice Lord.

'It built something else, Ixyldir,' he said. 'Something bigger and nastier. With what was left of its flesh farms, it manufactured something else.'

'Like what, *cold blue star?'* Ixyldir asked.

The Doctor shrugged.

'The next effective stage beyond transrats. Something *Transhuman,* is my guess. And that's what you're fighting now.'

Chapter

15

Now in Flesh Appearing

The thing prowled out onto the bridge. It was making a noise in its throat that was part growl, part purr. Its metal claws clinked on the grilled walkway as it took each step.

Amy, Bel and Samewell backed away from it, almost forgetting that a pair of Ice Warriors was closing on them from behind.

It was a monstrous thing. It was almost a man, a huge, lean, well-muscled man, in the same way that a transrat was almost a rat. It had been seriously bio-engineered. Its feet and hands were cybernetic implants that extruded huge steel talons. Amy realised, with rising disgust, that she could see where the bones of the hands were fused into the metal sheathing. Flexible armoured cables corded its skin like external arteries, and its scarred, baby-pink flesh was puckered with grafting scars, and covered with sockets and surgical plugs. It was moving on all fours like a giant cat. There was a disturbing hint that its human DNA had been blended with that of a major predator, like a

leopard or panther, altering its spine, hips and legs so that it could move fluidly and comfortably in quadruped form. It smelled of meat and blood and diseased tissue. Upright, it would have been easily as big as the Ice Warriors, perhaps as much as three metres tall.

Its face was a human skull that had been reinforced with chromed steel and adjusted, like a regular road car customised as a hot-rod. The jaw was huge, and the chin pointed and prominent, in order to accommodate the gleaming set of monstrous fangs. The teeth, twice the size of even adult human dentition, were coated in steel like precise medical instruments. It had a grin full of scalpels. Lip-less, cheek-less, the teeth formed a permanent smile. The crown of the skull was covered in wires, cables and tubes that formed a long, straggly mane of thick strands.

Its eyes glowed red.

It pounced.

Amy, Bel and Samewell ducked instinctively. The thing went clear over them anyway. Leaving a deep, throbbing growl in the air behind it, it crashed into the Ice Warriors.

Still cowering low, Amy turned to see what was

happening. The red-eyed monster was taking both of the Ice Warriors on. The glinting steel claws of one forepaw ripped around and tore a deep gouge through the scaled chest plate of one of the Ice Warriors, driving him backwards. The Warrior hissed in pain.

His companion swung in, wielding the ornate broadsword with both pincers. The first stroke missed. The red-eyed monster was ridiculously agile and fast. It somehow slipped under the Ice Warrior's next stroke, and turned as it rose behind him, burying both sets of front claws in the Martian's back. Green battle armour shredded. Individual scales twinkled like stars as they showered into the air. Amy flinched as the red-eyed monster lunged its huge jaws forward and ripped into the back of the stricken Ice Warrior's neck.

The other Warrior had regained its footing. As the red-eyed thing savaged his comrade's throat, he swung the axe. It struck the monster squarely in the right shoulder. Ugly, unhealthy-looking blood sprayed from the wound. The monumental impact smashed the red-eyed thing off its prey and clean through the guard rail.

It fell.

It did not fall far.

With extraordinary gymnastic skill, it snagged the

struts on the underside of the walkway, and swung under the bridge, somersaulting up, free, on the other side. It landed on the Ice Warrior with the axe from behind, knocking him over, face-first, into the half-broken guard rail. Entangled, they fought brutally with each other, each one trying to break the other's grip. The red-eyed monster tore away first, but only so it could pull back and put all its inhuman strength into a driving hook that ripped across the Ice Warrior's face, shredding his visor.

The Ice Warrior, mortally hurt, staggered backwards, hissing like a punctured tyre, and toppled over the torn rail. He dropped away into the flaming abyss below.

The other Ice Warrior, bleeding from his jagged wounds and ruptured scale-armour, came at the red-eyed thing, swinging his sword. The thing evaded the first two strokes, and then drove at the Ice Warrior, catching the side of the razor-sharp blade with its cybernetic hand. It plucked the sword out of the Ice Warrior's grip and threw it away. Then it went for the Ice Warrior's throat. The Ice Warrior clawed at it, grabbing it by the neck and shoulder with his powerful clamps. Locked together, they wrestled ferociously for

a few seconds.

The Ice Warrior, understanding that he was weakening and bleeding out, understanding that he was up against an adversary who was stronger, faster and essentially superior, understanding that he was effectively beaten, did what all dedicated warriors do as a last resort. Gripping the red-eyed thing that was busy killing him, so tightly that it couldn't break free, he lurched off the walkway too. He took his redeyed tormentor to its doom alongside him.

They vanished from view in the fires far below.

Amy, trembling, looked at the two young Morphans.

'Let's get out of here,' she said. 'You know, before something else really, stupid well insane happens.'

But it was too late. There were more of them, more of the red-eyed things.

They were stalking out of the hatch and onto the bridge, advancing towards the three, defenceless humans.

Rory, Vesta, Winnowner and Jack Duggat backed into the assembly hall, trying not to make any hasty movements. Jack still had hold of his hoe, but not in any way that suggested he was likely to wield it.

The red-eyed *It* that Vesta had seen in the woods

prowled in after them. Gazing at them, it padded through the snow like a leopard on all fours, frost glinting on its matted mane of tubes and wires. It smiled an eternal, unintentional steel smile.

It entered the wood-panelled hall, and looked around, as though sensing something familiar. It returned its crimson gaze to the four terrified humans and stared at them. Then it rose on its hind legs and stood upright like a man, an adjustment that was somehow even more distressing.

'Oh, save us,' whispered Winnowner. 'What has Guide wrought?'

'Guide,' the thing echoed. It was a horrid, sticky sound, a rumble that was part growl and part phlegm. Its fearsome teeth made normal speech impossible, but it gurgled the word out of a small, cybernetic vocal implant that they could see in its throat, now that it was standing upright.

It was so frighteningly tall.

'Guide...' it repeated. 'I... am assigned to secure and protect... the Guide system.'

'The Guide?' asked Winnowner.

'The Guide system... must not fall... into enemy hands. Aggressors have been detected... tampering has

been detected... purge now under way.'

It raised one gnarled, part-metal fist and wiped droplets of blood off its awful teeth.

'I... am assigned to secure and protect... the Guide system. It is... here.'

'What are you?' asked Rory.

'Transhuman sixty-eight of one hundred fifty... woken and refitted for this Category A emergency...'

'Woken?' asked Rory.

'From... the cryo-store,' it replied. 'Stand aside... I am assigned... to secure and protect... the Guide system.'

They wavered.

'I am... sanctioned to slay... anything that stands in opposition to my task...' it said.

They got out of its way. It dropped back onto all fours and padded past them.

'I never asked for this!' Winnowner said. 'I just asked for help! I never expected that any of the patients would be woken!'

Rory looked at her sharply. 'Wait, you said "woken" too! What do you know?'

'Only what I must know!' Winnowner snapped. 'The secret that passes from one generation to the next,

through the last in each line. The secret that I must pass to Elect Groan before the end of my time.'

'I think you should share it with the room,' said Rory, 'because your time could be up any second now.'

'No!' Winnowner said.

'What is this?' asked Vesta. 'Winnowner Cropper, what is this?'

'Winnowner?' Jack urged.

'I will keep Guide's secret. It is not my place to tell.' Winnowner's voice dropped low. 'I will keep it to the end, for the good of all Morphans.'

'I don't think that's anything like good enough right now,' said Rory.

'Tell us what this thing is and what it wants!' Vesta demanded.

'Be silent!' the red-eyed thing growled, turning back to them and rising up again. 'Or I will... silence you.'

'I don't think that would be very friendly at all,' said the Doctor. 'Especially not as you're all supposed to be on the same side.'

Light levels in the assembly had shifted. The shimmering effect of the holographic telepresence field was rising like mist from the metal circle patterns inlaid in the old wooden floor. The Doctor was in their

midst, sitting in a high-backed chair, facing a white control console. He got up and walked over to face the beast.

'Sorry I couldn't get here earlier. I was trying to tune in,' he said. 'Very difficult, when you haven't got a reliable Guide.' He glanced at Rory. 'Everything OK, Rory?' he asked.

'Oh, you know, Doctor,' Rory shrugged. 'Apart from the Ice Warriors, and the spaceship shooting the place up, and that thing there, everything's dandy.'

The Doctor nodded and looked back at 'that thing there'. It growled softly.

'A Transhuman construct,' he said. 'Advanced martial model. Part of an emergency protocol. A last resort. If the terraformers are threatened. The plantnations don't have any actual weapons. They don't have guns or anything. This is what the system manufactures if a weapon's really needed.'

'If the Morphans are threatened,' said Winnowner.

The Doctor shook his head. 'Sorry, no, actually. They don't really care about you. You're just... the help. In the long run, you're expendable.'

'Winnowner said she had a secret,' said Rory.

'I'm sure she does. Last of her generation. The dark

and murky legacy. The sort of secret that would make life unbearable for the Morphans if they knew about it. The sort of secret that makes you oh-so protective of your Guide Emanual. You had to pass the secret on eventually. Who were you going to tell, Winnowner? Bill Groan?'

'Mind your own business, you unguidely—'

'Listen to me, Winnowner Cropper,' said the Doctor, 'I've figured it out. It took me a while, because I didn't have a Guide to show me the shortcuts, but I figured it out.'

He wandered back to the console.

'The Morphans don't matter,' he said sadly. 'They are not building Hereafter for their descendants. They're building it for their ancestors. There are around a thousand human beings sleeping here in the mountain, in suspended animation.'

'What?' asked Vesta.

'It's been misremembered over the years,' said the Doctor. 'Patience is such an important virtue to you Morphans. "Those who are patient will provide for all of the plantnation." Well, "the patient" are right here. *Patients*. Lined up in hibemetic capsules under the Firmer. I'm pretty sure they represent the elite of Earth

before. The most powerful and influential people.
People who were convinced that they deserved to live.
People who believed they were so special they had to have a brand new world made just for them.'
He looked at the lurking shadow of the Transhuman.
'People, in fact, who weren't prepared to toil away their lives building a new world. They just expected the boring work to be done for them by common and disposable labourers.'
'Th-that's not how Guide explains it!' cried Winnowner.
'I'm sure Guide puts it a great deal more delicately,' said the Doctor. 'But that's the size of it. And only this, only the interference of the Ice Warriors, rival colonists, is a crisis major enough to force the system to wake some of them up. A Catagory A crisis. It was enough to wake them up, and arm them for war.'
He stared at the Transhuman.
'You're a frightening thing,' he said. 'And I thought Ice Warriors were dangerous. It takes a lot of fuel to keep a metabolism like that going, doesn't it? You're essentially a carnivore. I thought the transrat swarms were getting out and killing the livestock, but it was you lot, wasn't it? The first of you to be woken and

released?'

'There was... a fuel requirement,' it growled. 'Because the Ice Warriors had disabled most of the flesh farms that were designed to feed you during their cull of the transrats,' replied the Doctor. 'You and your kind needed huge hits of high calorific intake to get going.'

The Transhuman walked back into the light of the hologram field and faced the Doctor.

'You have... no authority,' it said. 'The system... does not recognise you. This crisis... is almost resolved. The alien enemy... is virtually routed. Equilibrium will be... restored.'

'Good, good,' said the Doctor. 'But why don't you tell the nice Morphans what will happen to them when you finally wake up for good? Even Winnowner doesn't know that, does she? Tell them. In a few years' time, another generation or two, when the terraforming is finally finished, and Hereafter is properly Earth-like, the Patients will *finally* wake up.'

'This is... the plan,' the Transhuman said. 'The colonial scheme.'

The Doctor looked at Vesta and Jack and Winnowner. 'When the Pilgrim Fathers went across to

the New World, they took livestock with them. That's all you are. Livestock. Doing all the hard work in the meantime, so they don't have to. And when they wake up in Eden, you know what? They're going to be really hungry. Really, *really* hungry.'

'No!' cried Winnowner.

'Meat is meat,' said the Doctor. 'Isn't that right, Mr Transhuman?'

'Survival requires... certain practicalities,' it growled.

'Oh, everyone's saying that today!' the Doctor grinned.

The Transhuman lashed out. Its claws passed through the holographic Doctor.

'Temper, temper,' the Doctor chided. 'You can't touch me. I'm not really there at all.'

'You have spoken... too much and for too long,' said the Transhuman. It purred a grotesque approximation of a laugh. 'Your location has been traced and identified. Terraformer Two, operations management command C, level six.'

The Doctor turned from his console in the gleaming command chamber, ignoring the hologram figures being generated around him. He'd seen something

reflecting in the vast plate-glass viewport in front of him.

Behind him, three Transhuman killers were padding towards him from the hatchway on all fours, smiling their eternal smiles. A fourth followed, walking upright, herding three, rigidly frightened captives ahead of it.

Amy, Samewell and Bel.

'You will cease... your interference,' it snarled.

'Ah,' said the Doctor.

'Don't do it!' Amy said, as bravely as she could manage.

'If I don't, Pond, it will kill you,' replied the Doctor sadly.

'It's going... to kill you all *anyway*,' it growled.

Chapter

16

Guide Us to Thy Perfect Light

'Oh well,' said the Doctor, 'if you're going to be like *that*. I think it's time to act with a little honour.'

'What?' asked the upright Transhuman.

'He was talking to me,' hissed Lord Ixyldir.

The Ice Lord leapt out of hiding and swung his war sword at the towering cyborg beast. The stupendous blow hit it in the neck and it lurched sideways. The Transhuman uttered a strangled, drawn-out gurgle of pain and outrage as it toppled.

Bel screamed.

Before Ixyldir's blow had even landed, his squad of Warriors had joined the assault, lumbering like tanks from their concealment behind pipework and workstations. Ssord led the charge, swinging his barbed axe wide.

The Transhumans howled and sprang forward to meet the attack, claws and fangs bared.

'Amy!' the Doctor yelled, beckoning to Amy, Samewell and Bel. 'Get out of the way!'

The cyborg monsters were too busy with the

Martian assault to bother about the three humans. Amy, Samewell and Bel rushed over to the Doctor at the workstation.

'Get down!' the Doctor cried. 'Get into cover!'

'I thought we were dead in all sorts of different ways then!' Amy cried.

'We still could be!' the Doctor replied. 'Get behind the console! This is going to get nasty!'

The battle was already a savage and hideously brutal melee. The Ice Warriors put all their cold-blooded fury into every strike and hack of their blades. The Transhumans ripped back with claws that sliced through scaled plating. They possessed extraordinarily robust physiques. They had been built to be proof against the lethal sonic disruptors that the Ice Warriors had used against the transrats. They shrugged off all but the deepest and most savage cuts of the wicked Martian blades.

Ixyldir withdrew his sword after his first blistering attack to find that his target was already back up and attacking him. Talons lacerated his cape and punctured his pectoral and shoulder guards. Fangs bared, the Transhuman went for his face. Ixyldir smashed the creature in the side of its reinforced skull with his war

sword and knocked it onto the floor. It rolled, rising again.

One of the Ice Warriors was already down, dead or dying on the floor. Another was torn and wounded. Despite being driven, determined and possessing greater numbers, the Ice Warriors were still not going to win the fight.

The Doctor turned back to the hologram.

'Rory Williams Pond!' he yelled. 'Do it now if you're going to do it at all!'

In the assembly hall, the Transhuman turned with a snarl. One of the humans, the smaller male, had slipped away while it had been occupied with the holographic interloper.

It sniffed, tracking him.

'Run, Rory!' Vesta screamed.

Rory was doing more than running. The key that Winnowner had slipped him while the Doctor was distracting the red-eyed beast had opened the padlock of the rear doors. He rushed towards the Incrypt hatch and pressed his palm on the checker.

The hatch opened. He ran into a vault lit by blue neon light. It reminded him of a really naff nightclub. There was a raised console in the centre of the floor, a

white dais.

He ran to it. His palm-print woke it up.

The Guide opened. A column of digitised information erupted like a fountain from the middle of the dais. It just kept going, generating layer after layer of shimmering holograms: diagrams, data blocks, code sequences, text and picture information.

'Oh my god,' Rory mumbled, pressing keys and buttons at random. 'There's so much stuff! There's *too much* stuff! I don't even begin to know where to look!'

He thought hard, frantically. The hologram of the Doctor was back in the hall, too far away to consult. How was he going to find anything? How was he—

He thought hard. He tried to stay calm. How hard could it be? Though the Morphans had forgotten the technical aspects of the system, it was probably designed to be a user-friendly, multi-purpose device. It shouldn't be any more tricky than figuring out the basic functions of a new laptop, or the apps on a smartphone. He had a fundamental advantage over all the Morphans: he was accustomed to basic interactive technology.

He looked at the streams of overlapping data pouring out in front of him. Amongst it all, he saw a

single, small icon:

?

He touched it.

It dissolved. Virtually incomprehensible 3D data continued to blossom around him, but the ? Was replaced by two more simple icons: a human hand and a human mouth.

Did he want to enter his question manually, or by voice?

He touched the mouth.

'Speak request,' said the voice of Guide.

'I need you to open access to the entire Guide database via...' Rory hesitated. Where the hell was it? What had the red-eyed thing said?

'... Terraformer Two, operations management command C, level six!' he yelled, remembering.

The Transhuman, snarling like a rabid dog, exploded through the Incrypt door behind him.

The console in front of the Doctor lit up. It made the Doctor jump. Deliciously comprehensive quantities of information were uploading into the workstation display.

'Good boy, Rory!' the Doctor cried.

'Did he do it?' asked Amy, peering out from behind

the workstation. 'Did he? Did he do it?'

'Yes,' said the Doctor, 'he jolly well did. I never doubted him for a moment. I have direct access to our Guide e-manual.'

'So what's the matter?' Amy asked.

'Gosh,' said the Doctor. 'There's quite a lot of it. Enough information to... to build a world, in fact. It's a lot to take in.'

'Can you do anything with it?' she asked.

'It would probably take a normal human days just to browse this, even with a decent search tool...'

'Doctor! We don't have days!' Amy yelled.

Proving her point, one of the battling Ice Warriors flew overhead, hurled headlong by a snarling Transhuman. The Ice Warrior smashed into the plate-glass screen, cracked it, bounced off, and fell onto the deck. Lord Ixyldir had several deep notches in the blade of his war sword, and the monster he was battling was showing no signs of weakening.

'We certainly don't,' the Doctor agreed. 'But fortunately, I'm not a normal human.'

Rory yelped and tried to put the dais between him and the slavering, grinning predator that was coming for him.

It snarled, head low, back arched, ready to spring.

Of all the possible deaths he'd faced in the last day or so, Rory was pretty sure this was going to be the least pleasant by quite a margin.

Vesta appeared behind it and hit it on the back of the head with a mallet. The creature roared and turned away from Rory for a moment.

'You've still got that mallet?' Rory said in surprise.

'I thought it might come in useful!' Vesta replied.

The monster, uttering a deep, throbbing growl, was now circling them both. It tensed to spring.

Roaring, Jack Duggat charged into the Incrypt and drove the blade of his hoe into the Transhuman's side.

The impact smashed the Transhuman into the wall.

Straining hard, the biggest of the Morphans leaned on the shaft of his implement and pinned the writhing, howling beast in place.

'Run away, Elect Rory!' he bellowed. 'Take Vesta with you! In Guide's name, run away now!'

Rory wasn't having that. Jack Duggat had just saved his life. He ran to Jack's side, adding his own strength to the labourer's brawn. They leaned on the hoe, spearing the raging, thrashing Transhuman to the wall.

Vesta joined them, lending her effort too.

'We can hold it!' Rory cried. 'We can hold it!'

The sturdy shaft of the farm implement gave out under the force involved and splintered.

'Or maybe not,' Rory said, as he, Vesta and Jack backed away.

'Doctor!' Amy yelled.

With a vast, two-handed blow, Ssord had just managed to bury the blade of his axe in the skull of one of the Transhumans, killing it, but it was too small a victory, too late. Lord Ixyldir had been knocked over and wounded. The three remaining Transhumans were about to make short work of the Ice Warrior cohort. And others - several others - had just appeared in the chamber doorway behind them. Their eyes shone red. Their smiles were steel.

The Doctor had selected a section of the Guide database and centred it on his desk display. His Time Lord mind had picked it out of the mass of data, like a needle in the proverbial haystack. Well, pretty much. He didn't want to admit to Amy that he was only fifty per cent sure it was actually the section he needed.

'Do you know what you're doing?' Amy yelled.

'Yes!' he shouted back.

'Do you, or are you just making it up as you go

along?' she demanded.

'It's called *business as usual!* he replied.

He took a deep breath, reached into his pocket and pulled out his sonic screwdriver. He blew on it and rubbed it briskly between his hands as though he was warming up a set of roulette dice.

'Come on,' he pleaded, 'you've had quite enough rest for one day! *Come on,* daddy needs a brand new planet!'

He aimed his sonic screwdriver at the display and pressed the activator.

Chapter

17

Close by Me Forever

Nothing happened.

It only didn't happen for few seconds, but it felt to everyone concerned like an eternity. They teetered on the very edge of life or death.

Then the Transhumans stopped in their tracks. They stopped fighting. They retracted their claws. The red light in their eyes grew dim. They turned their backs on the battered, bemused Ice Warriors, and slunk away, as aloof and disinterested as cats.

In the Incrypt, the Transhuman pounced and crashed into Rory, Vesta and Jack, and knocked them flat on their backs, but it didn't kill them. They looked up to see it padding over them and walking away. It prowled out through the assembly hall, through the outer doors beyond, and began to bound away across the snow until it was lost in the darkness.

'Are you two all right?' asked Rory, getting up.

Winnowner was peering in at them through the Incrypt hatch anxiously.

'I thought we were dead,' said Jack.

'Get used to it,' said Rory, 'that's how we roll.'

They walked back into the hall together. In the hologram field, the Doctor was beaming at them. Amy, Bel and Samewell were with him.

So were a surprising number of battle-damaged Ice Warriors.

'I reset their sanction,' the Doctor said. 'The Transhumans, I mean. It turned out to be quite a simple instruction in the end. You just had to find the right override.'

'You did what?' asked Rory.

'I countermanded their orders. I sent them back to deactivation. Back to hibernetic suspension. Back to sleep.'

'All of them?' asked Amy.

'All of them,' the Doctor confirmed, 'and I hope they'll stay there for a long time.'

He looked back at Rory.

'Rory, get your friends to go and tell the other Morphans that the crisis is over. I've got to have a little tete-a-tete with Lord Ixyldir here, but that should be a formality. Then well come down to Beside and find you. All right?'

'Yes, Doctor,' said Rory.

'And it *is* safe,' said the Doctor. 'Lord Ixyldir won't be doing any more attacking, will you, Lord Ixyldir?'

The Ice Lord took a moment to reply, but it was a regular Ice Warrior pause.

'No, *cold blue star,'* he replied.

The wounded Ice Warriors began to patch themselves up. Amy, Bel and Samewell tried to offer some help, but they didn't really know enough about Martian physiology, and they were also a little freaked out to be so close to giant green aliens who had spent most of the previous day chasing them with murderous intent.

'Why exactly should I desist from my pursuit of this planet?' Lord Ixyldir asked the Doctor.

'Because it's the honourable thing to do,' the Doctor replied. 'You have ships. Go elsewhere.'

'Because you won this battle for us?' asked the Ice Lord.

'If you like,' the Doctor replied. 'I suppose there's a mark of honour to be repaid there. A matter of respect. But before we even started this fight, I told you why you ought to leave Hereafter and the Morphans alone.'

He walked back over to the console where the Guide database flickered and cycled in a tight information swarm.

'You're trying to rebuild your civilisation, Ixyldir,' he said. 'That's good. Ultimately, the empire of the Ice Warriors is a positive force in the universe. Except for the few occasions you put a size sixteen foot wrong, or forget to do the right thing.'

The Ice Lord did not reply.

'Rebuild, Ixyldir,' said the Doctor. 'Rebuild your world, rebuild your race, rebuild your empire. Rebuild it all. But make sure you rebuild your ideals too. Rebuild the principles that made you a great and honourable galactic power in the first place. Don't prey on the weak. Don't steal from the helpless. Don't murder the innocent. Be a force for good, not a force for yourself.'

The Doctor selected some data from the Guide and pulled it up in hologram form.

'The original Morphan pioneers did a good job of surveying this galactic neighbourhood,' he said. 'I've only made a quick study of it, but it's very interesting. Very interesting indeed. They picked Hereafter because it was certainly the most Earth-like world in the quadrant. It wasn't, however, the most *Mars*- like. See here?'

He pointed to one of the stars on the chart. His

fingertip dipped into the hologram as though he was writing on water.

'Atrox 881. It's about eight light years from here. Entirely unsuitable for humans. Well within range of your ships. I happen to know, Ixyldir, that in about 9,000 years' time, one of the most significant fiefworlds of the Ixon Mons dynasty will be located there. A quadrant capital. A famous centre of culture and power. It'll be run by a particularly able warlord called Azylax. If I remember my Galactic Migration Eras correctly, it's a colony that's due to be founded any day now.'

Ixyldir studied the chart.

'Atrox 881,' the Ice Lord murmured. 'From the scans, it appears to be... a cold blue star.'

'A *Belot'ssar* indeed, Ixyldir,' said the Doctor. 'Perhaps Lord Azylax was invoking something entirely different when he gave me my nickname. Perhaps he was remembering something that I hadn't done yet.'

'Will you not stay, Doctor?' asked Bill Groan.

Many of the Morphans gathered in the comforting warmth of the assembly raised their voices in hearty encouragement.

'We'd love to,' said the Doctor, glancing at Amy and Rory beside him. 'But... miles to go before we sleep, and all that.'

'We've got a long journey ahead of us,' said Rory.

'But you came all this way to well-wish us for the festival,' said Vesta. 'All the way from your plantnation. Wherever that is.'

'I think we've well-wished you more than enough already,' said the Doctor. 'You need some time to tidy up. You've got rebuilding to do, Elect. Some people have lost loved ones. You've come through a crisis and survived, but there's a hard winter ahead. Several, in fact. The Firmers are stabilised, but it will take a few more years before they start to ease the climate back out of ice-age mode. So card wool. Knit. Collect plenty of firewood. You'll do fine, though. You always have. A bit of hard work, and you'll get through it. I know you're not afraid of hard work.'

He looked at the faces watching him in the solamp light.

'Celebrate your survival,' he said. 'And keep celebrating it. The elders of this plantnation, Bill and Winnowner, and the others, they know they have a fine new generation to pass the torch to when the time

comes.'

Bel got to her feet. She was sitting in the front row between Samewell and Vesta.

'It is traditional for us to give gifts to well-wishers at the festival,' she said. 'We have not much this year, not with everything that has happened. But we wanted you to have this back at least.'

She handed the Doctor his wallet of psychic paper.

'Excellent choice,' he said. 'I always like to have some around. I have a gift for you too. For all the Morphans, actually.'

He looked at them.

'I took the liberty,' he said, 'of slightly resetting your Guide. Don't worry, Winnowner, I haven't fiddled with it. I've just tidied up the user interface so you can all access it. You'll find it easy to use. Just ask it questions. It has all sorts of information in it. It'll help you a great deal. It should make your life here, and the development of your colony, a little easier. It'll help you build and improve.'

He paused for a moment. Not quite an Ice Warrior pause, but a pause nevertheless.

'I also,' he said, 'reset the parameters of the hibernetic systems. The patients are sleeping. And they

will sleep for as long as you want them to. When the time comes, when Hereafter is ready, you can decide whether to wake them up or not.'

'If it was up to me,' said Rory, 'I'd let them sleep for ever.'

'If it was up to me,' said Amy, 'I'd pull the plug.'

'It's not up to either of you,' said the Doctor. 'It's up to the Morphans. They might decide it's cruel to leave their kin sleeping. They might think it's kinder to let them dream out eternity. The important thing is, if you do decide to wake them, it will be on your terms. You will have total control. They can't wake up repurposed and armed to the teeth like this time. You can revive them, and you can show them how the new world works, and what their part in it can be.'

He shrugged.

'It's not much of a present, I know,' he said, 'but the shops were shut.'

Chapter

18

Above Thy Deep

and Dreamless Sleep

It was about an hour before dawn. Guide's Bell would soon be ringing. The sky was almost mauve, and the stars were all out. The ghostly snow-cover was perfect for as far as the eye could see. The only blemish on the scene was the thin smoke rising from the fires that had burned out in the high woods. But Would Be would grow back in time. It would be a wood again.

At the top of the valley, the three of them stopped and turned to look back at the little town in the valley below. Its lamps twinkled in the cold air.

'It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas,' said Rory.

'Really? Christmas-like?' asked Amy.

'Christmas *-esque,'* said the Doctor.

They trudged up the slope to where the TARDIS was still patiently leaning.

'I notice *we* didn't get gifts,' said Amy.

'I got you gifts,' the Doctor replied.

'Did you?' asked Amy.

'What do I get?' asked Rory.

'You get to drive,' said the Doctor.

'Really?' asked Rory excitedly.

'For a little bit. With me supervising,' said the Doctor. 'I mean, it's now absolutely imperative that we get home for Christmas, or you pair will never let me hear the end of it, so I think Rory should drive. He's determined. He can find Christmas for us.'

'I can?' Rory asked.

'You're a wise man, Rory,' said the Doctor.

Rory rubbed his hands together gleefully and led the way into the TARDIS.

'So what do I get, then?' asked Amy.

The Doctor turned to her. He reached into his coat pocket, took something out and handed it to her.

It was a single mitten on a snapped piece of elastic.

'It's just what I've always wanted,' she whispered.

'Really?' he asked.

'Shut up, I'm welling up here,' she sniffed.

'Merry Christmas, Pond,' said the Doctor.

'It's not actually Christmas, you know,' she replied, following him into the TARDIS.

'Nonsense,' the Doctor replied, 'that's the great thing about time travel. It's always Christmas somewhere.'

The door closed.

After a moment there was a shudder, a creak and a groan. The light on the top of the police box began to flash like a cold blue star. With a shivering, juddering noise, the TARDIS began to dematerialise.

Far overhead, as the blue box faded and disappeared, taking its noise with it, lights glimmered in the night sky.

If they had still been standing there, the three travellers in the TARDIS would have been able to see the silent stars go by for the very last time.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Justin Richards, Steve

Tribe and Nik Vincent for their generous help and encouragement.

About the Author

Dan Abnett is a multiple *New York Times* bestselling author and an award-winning comic book writer. He has written forty novels, including the acclaimed *Gaunt's Ghosts* series, and the *Eisenhorn* and *Ravenor* trilogies. His latest novel for the Black Library, *Prospero Burns*, topped the SF charts in the UK and the USA. His novel *Triumff,* for Angry Robot, was published in 2009 and nominated for the British Fantasy Society Award for Best Novel, and his combat SF novel for the same publisher, *Embedded*, was published in spring 2011.

Dan has written more than a dozen comic strips and short stories for *Doctor Who Magazine,* as well as several *Doctor Who* audio plays and short stories for Big Finish Productions. His *Doctor Who* audio originals *The Forever Trap,* read by Catherine Tate, and *The Last Voyage*, read by David Tennant, were released by BBC Audio in 2008 and 2010. Between

2006 and 2008, he wrote the novels *Torchwood: Border Princes* and *Doctor Who: The Story of Martha* for BBC Books, and the *Torchwood* audio original *Everyone Says Hello*, read by Burn Gorman, for BBC Audio.

Dan was educated at St Edmund Hall, Oxford, and lives and works in Maidstone, Kent. His blog and website can be found at www.danabnett.com.

Follow him on Twitter @VincentAbnett.

Available now from BBC Books

The TARDIS Handbook

by Steve Tribe

£12.99 ISBN 978 1 846 07986 3

The inside scoop on 900 years of travel aboard the Doctor's famous time machine.

Everything you need to know about the TARDIS is here – where is came from, where it's been, how it works and how it has changed since we first encountered it in that East London junkyard in 1963.

Including photographs, design drawings and concept artwork from different eras of the series, this handbook

explores the ship's endless interior, looking inside its wardrobe and bedrooms, its power rooms and sick bay, its corridors and cloisters, and revealing just how the show's production teams have created the dimensionally transcendental police box, inside and out.

The TARDIS Handbook is the essential guide to the best ship in the universe.

Available now from BBC Books

Nuclear Time

by Oli Smith

£6.99 ISBN 978 1 846 07989 4

Colorado, 1981. The Doctor, Amy and Rory arrive in Appletown — an idyllic village in the remote American desert where the townsfolk go peacefully about their suburban routines. But when two more strangers arrive, things begin to change.

The first is a mad scientist — whose warnings are cut short by an untimely and brutal death. The second is the Doctor...

As death falls from the sky, the Doctor is trapped. The TARDIS is damaged, and the Doctor finds he is living

backwards through time. With Amy and Rory being hunted through the suburban streets of the Doctor's own future and getting farther away with every passing second, he must unravel the secrets of Appletown before time runs out...

A thrilling, all-new adventure featuring the Doctor, Amy and Rory, as played by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television.

Available now from BBC Books

The King's Dragon

by Una McCormack

£6.99 ISBN 978 1 846 07990 0

In the city-state of Geath, the King lives in a golden hall, and the people want for nothing. Everyone is happy and everyone is rich. Or so it seems,

When the Doctor, Amy and Rory look beneath the surface, they discover a city of secrets. In dark corners, strange creatures are stirring. At the heart of the hall, a great metal dragon oozes gold. Then the Herald appears, demanding the return of her treasure... And next come the gunships.

The battle for possession of the treasure has begun, and only the Doctor and his friends can save the people of the city from being destroyed in the crossfire of an ancient civil war. But will the King surrender his new-found wealth? Or will he fight to keep it...?

A thrilling, all-new adventure featuring the Doctor, Amy and Rory, as played by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television.

Available now from BBC Books

The Glamour Chase

by Gary Russell

£6.99 ISBN 978 1 846 07988 7

An archaeological dig in 1936 unearths relics of another time... And — as the Doctor, Amy and Rory realise — another place. Another planet.

But if Enola Porter, noted adventuress, has really found evidence of an alien civilisation, how come she isn't famous? Why has Rory never heard of her? Added to that, since Amy's been travelling with him for a while now, why does she now think the Doctor is from Mars?

As the ancient spaceship reactivates, the Doctor discovers that nothing and no one can be trusted. The things that seem most real could actually be literal fabrications — and very deadly indeed.

Who can the Doctor believe when no one is what they seem? And how can he defeat an enemy who can bend matter itself to their will? For the Doctor, Amy and Rory — and all of humanity — the buried secrets of the past are very much a threat to the present...

A thrilling, all-new adventure featuring the Doctor, Amy and Rory, as played by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television.

Available now from BBC Books

The Only Good Dalek

by Justin Richards and Mike Collins

£16.99 ISBN 978 1 846 07984 9

Station 7 is where the Earth Forces send all the equipment captured in their unceasing war against the Daleks. It's where Dalek technology is analysed and examined. It's where the Doctor and Amy have just arrived. But somehow the Daleks have found out about Station 7—and there's

something there that they want back.

With the Doctor increasingly worried about the direction the Station's research is taking, the commander of Station 7 knows he has only one possible, desperate, defence.

Because the last terrible secret of Station 7 is that they don't only store captured Dalek technology. It's also a prison. And the only thing that might stop a Dalek is another Dalek...

An epic, full-colour graphic novel featuring the Doctor and Amy, as played by Matt Smith and Karen Gillan in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television.

Available now from BBC Books

Dead of Winter

by James Goss

£6.99 ISBN 978 1 849 90238 1

In Dr. Bloom's clinic at a remote spot on the Italian coast, at the end of the eighteenth century, nothing is ever quite what it seems.

Maria is a lonely little girl with no one to play with. She writes letters to her mother from the isolated resort where she is staying. She tells of the pale English aristocrats and

the mysterious Russian nobles and their attentive servants. She tells of intrigue and secrets, and she tells of strange faceless figures that rise from the sea. She writes about the enigmatic Mrs Pond who arrives with her husband and her physician, and who will change everything.

What she doesn't tell her mother is the truth that everyone knows and no-one says – that the only people who come here do so to die...

A thrilling, all-new adventure featuring the Doctor, Amy and Rory, as played by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television.

Available now from BBC Books

The Way through the Woods

by Una McCormack

£6.99 ISBN 978 1 849 90237 3

Two teenage girls disappear into an ancient wood, a foreboding and malevolent presence both now and in the past. The modern motorway bends to avoid it, as did the old Roman road.

In 1917 the Doctor and Amy are desperate to find out

what's happened to Rory, who's vanished too.

But something is waiting for them in the woods.

Something hat's been there for thousands of years.

Something that is now waking up.

A thrilling, all-new adventure featuring the Doctor, Amy and Rory, as played by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television.

Available now from BBC Books

Hunter's Moon

by Paul Finch

£6.99 ISBN 978 1 849 90236 6

Welcome to Leisure Platform 9 – a place where gamblers and villains rub shoulders with socialites and celebrities. Don't cheat at the games tables, and be careful who you beat. The prize for winning the wrong game is to take part in another, as Rory is about to discover – and the next game could be the death of him.

When Rory is kidnapped by the brutal crime lord Xord Krauzzen, the Doctor and Amy must go undercover to infiltrate the deadly contest being played out in the ruins of

Gorgoror. But how long before Krauzzen realises the Doctor isn't a vicious mercenary and discovers what Amy is up to? It's only a matter of time.

And time is the one thing Rory and the other fugitives on Gorgoror don't have. They are the hunted in a game that can only end in death, and time for everyone is running out...

A thrilling, all-new adventure featuring the Doctor, Amy and Rory, as played by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television.

Available now from BBC Books

The Dalek Handbook

by Steve Tribe and James Goss

£9.99 ISBN 978 1 849 90232 8

Exterminate!

The chilling battle cry of the Daleks has terrorised and terrified countless billions across thousands of worlds throughout time and space, from Skaro, Vulcan and Exxilon to the Medusa Cascade, Churchill's War Room and the opening of the Pandorica. This is the comprehensive

history of the greatest enemies of the Doctor.

Learn about the Daleks' origins on the planet Skaro, how a Time Lord intervention altered the course of Dalek history, and how they emerged to wage war on Thals, Mechanoids, Movellans, Draconians and humans. With design artwork and photographs from five decades of *Doctor Who*, *The Dalek Handbook* also reveals the development of their iconic look and sound, and their enduring appeal in television, radio, books, comics and more.

Including the full story of the Daleks' centuries-long conflict with the one enemy they fear, the Doctor, The Dalek Handbook is the complete guide to the Daleks – in and out of their casings!

Available now from BBC Books

Touched by an Angel

by Jonathan Morris

£6.99 ISBN 978 1 849 90234 2

In 2003, Rebecca Whitaker died in a road accident. Her husband Mark is still grieving. Then he receives a battered envelope, posted eight years ago, containing a set of

instructions and a letter with a simple message:

'You can save her'

Later that night, while picking up a takeaway, Mark glances at a security monitor – to see himself, standing in the restaurant in grainy black and white. And behind him there's a stone statue of an angel. Covering it's eyes, as though weeping... Except, when Mark turns, there's nothing there.

As Mark is given the chance to save Rebecca, it's up to the Doctor, Amy and Rory to save the whole world. Because this time the Weeping Angels are using history itself as a weapon...

A thrilling, all-new adventure featuring the Doctor, Amy and Rory, as played by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television.

Available now from BBC Books

Paradox Lost

by George Mann

£6.99 ISBN 978 1 849 90235 9

London 1910: An unsuspecting thief gets more than he bargained for when he breaks into a house in

Kensington. He finds himself confronted by horrific, grey-skinned creatures that are waiting the devour his mind.

London 2789: An unimaginably ancient city. The remains of an android are dredged from the Thames. It's one of the latest models, only just developed. But it's been in the water for over a thousand years. And when the android is reactivated, it has a message – a warning that can only be delivered to a man named the Doctor.

The Doctor and his friends must solve a mystery that has spanned over a thousand years. Travelling backwards and forwards in time, they must unravel the threads of an ancient plot. If they fail, the deadly alien Squall will devour the world...

A thrilling, all-new adventure featuring the Doctor, Amy and Rory, as played by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television.

Available now from BBC Books

Borrowed Time

by Naomi A. Alderman

£6.99 ISBN 978 1 849 90233 5

Andrew Brown never has enough time. No time to call his sister, no time to prepare for that important presentation at the bank where he works... The train's late, the lift jams, the all-important meeting's started by the time he arrives. Disaster.

If only he'd had just a little more time.

Time is the business of Mr. Symington and Mr. Blenkinsop. They'll lend Andrew Brown some time – at a very reasonable rate of interest. If he was in trouble before he borrowed time, things have just got a lot worse.

Detecting a problem, the Doctor, Amy and Rory go undercover at the bank. The Doctor's a respected expert, and Amy's his trusted advisor. Rory has a job in the post room. But they'll have to move fast to stop Symington and Blenkinsop before they cash in their investments. The Harvest is approaching.

A thrilling, all-new adventure featuring the Doctor, Amy and Rory, as played by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television.

Available now from BBC Books

The Coming of the Terraphiles

by Michael Moorcock

£16.99 ISBN 978 1 846 07983 2

Miggea – a star on the very edge of reality. The cusp between this universe and the next. A point where space-time has worn thin, and is in danger of collapsing... And the venue for the grand finals of the competition to win the fabled Arrow of Law. The Doctor and Amy have joined the Terraphiles – a group dedicated to re-enacting ancient sporting events. They are determined to win the Arrow. But just getting to Miggea proves tricky. Reality is collapsing, ships are disappearing, and Captain Cornelius and his pirates are looking for easy pickings. Even when they arrive, the Doctor and Amy's troubles won't be over. They have to find out who is so desperate to get the Arrow of Law that they will kill for it. And uncover the traitor on their own team. And win the contest fair and square. And, of course, they need to save the universe from total destruction.

A thrilling, all-new adventure featuring the Doctor, Amy and Rory, as played by Matt Smith, Karen Gillan and Arthur Darvill in the spectacular hit series from BBC Television, written by the acclaimed science fiction and fantasy author Michael Moorcock.

Available now from BBC Books

The Brilliant Book 2012

Edited by Clayton Hickman

£14.99 ISBN 978 1 849 90230 4

Packed with unseen photographs and original artwork and illustrations, *The Brilliant Book of Doctor Who 2012* is your indespensible guide to Series Six of *Doctor Who*.

Weaving fact and fiction, interviews and information, the *Brilliant Book* boasts brand new material from the writers of the TV show, including Mark Gatiss, Gareth Roberts, Matthew Graham, Tom McRae and Steve Thompson, plus exclusive extras from Neil Gaiman, Matt Smith, Karen Gillan, Arthur Darvill and Alex Kingston take us behind the scenes in revealing new interviews, while showrunner Steven Moffat unravels the secrets of the scripts.

Learn the art of making a memorable monster, discover how the show's secrets are kept, and see a full episode-by-episode guide, including deleted scenes and hidden gems you might have missed. Find out who legendary Time Lord the Corsair really was, and voyage with the Pirate crew of the good ship Fancy before they heard the Siren's song; discover the full story of the

fight for Ganger rights and get a taste of the future with Dorium Maldovar.

The Brilliant Book of Doctor Who 2012 – no TARDIS traveller should be without it.

The Brilliant Book of Doctor Who 2012 *contains the code for a free download of Eleventh Doctor audiobook,* Doctor Who: Night of the Humans *(produced by AudioGo) by David Llewellyn.*

Available now from BBC Books

The Encyclopedia

Edited by Gary Russell

£25.00 ISBN 978 1 849 90231 1

The fully revised and updated *Doctor Who Encyclopedia*, covering every episode from 2005 to the present.

River Song still a riddle? Stumped by the stolen planets in the Medusa Cascade? Forgotten what happened in the Timelines that Never Happened? Look no further...

Completely revised and updated, this is the ultimate guide to everything and everyone that's ever happened, un-happened and happened again in the worlds and times of the Doctor. The *Doctor Who Encyclopedia* now covers the Eleventh Doctor's first two seasons, plus every Ninth and

Tenth Doctor story, and is packed with photographs and artwork from seven stunning years of adventures – including the charity specials, animated adventures, online Adventure Games, *Tardisodes* and preludes.

This is your complete tour of time and space – space from Abaddon and Inspector Abberline to Melody Zucker and the Zygons.

AudioGO The home of BBC Audiobooks

NEW RELEASES

TSAR WARS
STARRING TOM BAKER

EXCLUSIVE AUDIO ADVENTURE!

A brand new multi-voice adventure for the Fourth Doctor, played by Tom Baker, following on from the Hornets' Nest and Demon Quest audio series. Written by Paul Magrs.

BLACKOUT

An exciting audio exclusive adventure, featuring the Eleventh Doctor, Amy and Rory from the hit BBC One TV series.

DOCTOR WHO

Order now from **www.audiogo.co.uk/doctor-who**

Terms and Conditions: This offer is as stated and all purchases remain subject to our terms and conditions at www.audiogo.co.uk. The offer entitles the bearer to 25% off their next purchase of CDs or downloads at www.audiogo.co.uk. The voucher code cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer and is valid on a single transaction. The offer cannot be used retrospectively, ie on previous or existing orders. There is no cash alternative and the offer is not transferable or assignable. Offer applies to online orders only. This does not affect your statutory rights. The promoter reserves the right to amend or discontinue this offer at any time. Promotional voucher code expires on 31/01/12. The decision of the promoter regarding any aspect of the offer is final and binding and no correspondence will be entered into. The promoter of the voucher code is AudioGO limited, St James House, Lower Bristol Road, Bath, BA2 3BH

Author photo © Adélie High

Dan Abnett is a novelist and award-winning comic book writer. He has written over thirty-five novels, including the acclaimed **Gaunt's Ghosts** series, and the **Eisenhorn** and **Ravenor** trilogies. His **Horus Heresy** novel **Prospero Burns** was a **New York Times** bestseller, and topped the SF charts in the UK and the US. He lives and works in Maidstone, Kent.

Doctor Who and TARDIS are
trademarks of the BBC.
Cover design: Lee Binding @ tea-lady.co.uk

The winter festival is approaching for the hardy colony of Morphans, but no one is in the mood to celebrate. They're trying to build a new life on a cold new world, but each year it gets harder and harder. It's almost as if some dark force is working against them.

Then three mysterious travellers arrive out of the midwinter night. Are they bringing the gift of salvation, or doom? What else lurks out there in the dark? What else might be about to wake up?

ISBN 978-1-849-90243-4

9 781849 902434